

ENHANCING HERMENEUTICAL ACCURACY FOR THE
PREACHING OF OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVES
USING 2 SAMUEL 11–12 AS A CASE STUDY

A THESIS

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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To Donald Sunukjian and Jeffrey Arthurs

Molders of preachers, least of all me.

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GLOSSARY

Application. An actionable exhortation or exemplification that derives from the pericopal theology of the passage(s) cited (see page 80n3).

Evangelical. For the purposes of the thesis-project, Christians who affirm the Trinity, salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone, and the authority and inerrancy of Scripture.

Exegetical Theology. The obligatory and actionable truth taught in a pericope that, when expressed, reflects the time-specific way the original audience would have understood it.

Expository Message. Also known as an exposition, it is a sermon that exemplifies the principles of expository preaching.

Expository Preaching. Preaching that proclaims and applies the pericopal theology of its biblical preaching text(s).

Moralizing. The hermeneutical error of *atomistically* turning a biblical character's behavior into a *do or do not do as the biblical character did* principle or command (see pages 3n13 and 113–15).

Pericopal Theology. The obligatory and actionable truth taught in a pericope that, when expressed, is a timeless expression of the pericope's exegetical theology. Abraham Kuruvilla writes that it "forms the intermediary between inscription and application, between the writing of the text and the response to it." Abraham Kuruvilla, "Pericopal Theology: An Intermediary Between Text and Application," *Trinity Journal* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 270.

Pericope. The smallest cohesive unit of a biblical book that is unified by a primary theological message. Kuruvilla writes that "a pericope . . . is essentially a self-intact sense unit bearing a relatively complete and integral [theological] idea" that can, context considered, be "inductively derived" from an analysis of the pericope itself. Abraham Kuruvilla, "Pericopal Theology: An Intermediary Between Text and Application," *Trinity Journal* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 266, 280.

Take-Home Truth. The answer—using timeless or contemporary language—to the primary question that a biblical text is designed to answer. It serves as the "truth [the preacher] wants the listeners to take home and remember even if they forget everything else." Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 73, 66.

Theological Message. A statement—exegetical, pericopal, or homiletical—that represents the *primary*, obligatory, and actionable truth(s) that a pericope is designed to teach.

ABSTRACT

Many evangelical preachers lack the hermeneutical skills to discern the pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives. The result is that many preachers fail to deliver expository messages from such passages. This thesis-project makes the case that expository preaching is the only reliable way to proclaim God or his will; supports this by examining God's nature, God's revelation, and biblical authority; and offers a user-friendly reference tool to equip preachers to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. A literature review explores contemporary theories of interpretation, Old Testament narrative art, and pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives. A survey documents the reference tool's effectiveness.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Preaching is a prominent feature of *evangelical*¹ worship services.² Many evangelical preachers, because of their view of Scripture, desire to practice *expository preaching*.³ For evangelicals, as Haddon Robinson notes, the benefit of expository preaching is that it renders the preacher's message God's message.⁴ The problem, as it pertains to preaching Old Testament narratives, is that many evangelical preachers fail to deliver *expository messages* from them.⁵

The Reason for the Problem

The reason that many evangelical preachers fail to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives is that they do not have the requisite skills to discern the *pericopal theology* of Old Testament narratives. The requisite skills include the ability—
independently or in conjunction with secondary sources—to discern the contribution of the theological, historical, and literary contexts of Old Testament narratives to their pericopal theology.

Two obstacles account for the reason that many evangelical preachers fail to

¹ Terms that are defined in the Glossary of the thesis-project (see page vii) are italicized the first time they appear in the body of a chapter.

² Michael Quicke, "History of Preaching," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 66–67.

³ See the section "Assumptions" on page 10 of the thesis-project.

⁴ Haddon Robinson, "Convictions of Biblical Preaching," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 23.

⁵ See the section "Assumptions" on page 10 of the thesis-project.

deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. The first obstacle is the influence of inaccurate hermeneutical models by evangelical authors. Two influential hermeneutical models will illustrate this obstacle. The first is found in Howard Hendricks' *Living by the Book*,⁶ which has sold over 300,000 copies.⁷ Hendricks' model can be helpful for discovering insights into biblical texts, but proves to be hermeneutically insufficient, because it largely ignores a necessary part of interpretation, namely, genre, containing only eleven pages on it, one on narrative.⁸ Furthermore, Hendricks' book inadequately handles *application*. Hendricks appears to understand that application derives from textual meaning when he warns, "Be careful how you interpret. You will only multiply error [in application] if you start with a faulty interpretation."⁹ He does not heed his own warning, however, when he fails to demonstrate the relationship between interpretation and application by teaching that application springs from the answers to nine questions. These questions give the distinct impression that application is any reasonable and actionable idea that comes to mind in response to a text.¹⁰

The second influential but inaccurate hermeneutical model is what I call "universalizing the plot line." This approach, which has wide support in evangelical

⁶ Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book* (Chicago: Moody, 1991).

⁷ Moody Publishers, Church Life & Reference, accessed August 10, 2011, <http://www.mpbooksellers.com/taxonomy/term/35/0?page=3>.

⁸ Hendricks and Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 209–19. On the significance of genre for interpretation, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 26.

⁹ Hendricks and Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 293.

¹⁰ Hendricks and Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 304–8.

homiletical scholarship, teaches that the pericopal theology of an Old Testament narrative can be discerned by, first, creating a single-sentence plot summary (i.e., exegetical idea) of the narrative and then replacing the plot summary's time-specific terms with timeless ones.¹¹ Representative is Steven Mathewson's influential book *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*.¹² Mathewson's approach contains three flaws. The first is that it violates the accepted hermeneutical guideline, “*Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative (i.e., obligatory) way—unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.*”¹³ As table 1.1 demonstrates, Mathewson's violation of this hermeneutical guideline tends to lead to pericopal-theological messages that teach that people today will get quite similar results to those of an Old Testament character

¹¹ Creating exegetical (big) ideas for Old Testament narratives is not the problem. Exegetical ideas are helpful for demonstrating an understanding of an Old Testament narrative's plot line. The problem is in thinking that the pericopal theology of an Old Testament narrative can be arrived at by universalizing its exegetical idea *a la* most New Testament epistolary texts. This was affirmed by Alan Hultberg, Associate Professor, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, December 12, 2011, conversation.

¹² Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002).

¹³ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 118–19 (emphasis theirs). See also William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 2004), 424–26. Mathewson appears to either reject this hermeneutical guideline or be ignorant of it. This can be seen in his limited approval of *moralizing* (see *Glossary*). Of moralizing misapplications like “when you decide to quit teaching your Sunday school class, or stop volunteering as an aide in your daughter's kindergarten class, or take a break from singing in your church choir, you can create idleness that leads to boredom and heightened vulnerability to temptation” from 2 Sam 11:1–4, Mathewson says, “I don't suggest that a preacher should never draw [such] application[s]. . . . But any mention of them should be in passing.” Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, 100.

Mathewson supports his view by citing two sources. The first is Carl G. Kromminga, “Remember Lot's Wife: Preaching Old Testament Narrative Texts,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 18, no. 1 (April 1983): 32–46. Instead of supporting the practice of moralizing, Kromminga deems it an illegitimate, harmful, but “easy” way for preachers to exploit an “apparent surface ‘lesson’ of the text” (38). He wrote the article to enable people to distinguish between moralizing and valid application from Old Testament narratives.

The second source that Mathewson cites in support of moralizing is 1 Cor 10:6, 11. For the reasons why 1 Cor 10:6, 11 does not teach the validity of moralizing, see Appendix C, particularly pages 113–15; 117–18 of the thesis-project.

when they are in similar situations today, if they respond like the character in the Old Testament narrative did.

Table 1.1. Representative Theological Messages, Universalizing the Plot Line

Text	Exegetical-Theological Message ^a	Pericopal-Theological Message ^b
2 Sam 11–12 (ESV)	When <u>David</u> failed to walk with God, <u>he</u> put his life, family, and career in jeopardy.	When <u>believers</u> fail to walk with God, <u>they</u> put their lives, families, and careers in jeopardy.
Gen 13	<u>Abraham</u> preserved God's blessing when <u>he</u> faced conflict by taking the initiative to resolve it.	God's people preserve God's blessing when <u>they</u> face conflict by taking the initiative to resolve it.
Gen 22:1–19	<u>Abraham</u> put obedience to God first <u>even though</u> he faced the prospect of sacrificing his son <u>Isaac</u> .	Faithful worshipers of God will put obedience to God first <u>even when</u> there is <u>great cost</u> involved.
2 Sam 13–18	<u>Absalom</u> rebelled against <u>David</u> because <u>David</u> failed to provide a good relationship and a good role model as a <u>father</u> .	[unstated] <u>Children</u> rebel against <u>fathers</u> when <u>fathers</u> fail to provide a good relationship with and be a good role model for their <u>children</u> .

Source: Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, 87–88, 106, 210.

^a Underlined words reflect time-specific expressions of timeless realities.

^b Underlined words reflect timeless realities of their time-specific expressions.

In his analysis of the highly varied ways that God responds to Israel's sin of "doing evil in the sight of the LORD" in Judges, Robert Chisholm supports this hermeneutical guideline—and by implication disputes the validity of Mathewson's approach—when he concludes that it is unjustifiable to assert that Old Testament narratives teach with much specificity how God will respond to others when they find themselves in similar situations in the future:

[While] God is unchanging . . . this does not mean that he always . . . relates to people in the same way. . . . If we learn anything from the stories of the Old Testament, it is that God cannot be placed in a box where his response can always be predicted. On the contrary, he is free to act as he pleases, even though his actions may seem contradictory or inconsistent from our limited perspective.¹⁴

The second flaw of Mathewson's approach is that it does not understand that God—his nature or covenant-keeping—is the subject of the exegetical-theological

¹⁴ Robert B. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 191.

messages of Old Testament narratives.¹⁵ Gordon McConville and Philip Satterthwaite write that “in the histories as in the Pentateuch [YHWH’s] actions are foundational, revealing key aspects of Yahweh’s nature.¹⁶ Andrew Hill and John Walton emphatically agree:

The purpose of the historical literature of the Bible is to show the ways in which the Lord has acted in history to fulfill his covenant promises and to carry out his agenda. One could call it didactic (giving instruction) in the sense that it is revelation of who God is by recording what he has done. . . . Israel’s God is revealed as One who has a plan for history and who intervenes to ensure that the plan is executed. . . . The Old Testament historical literature needs to be understood within the frame of reference that it is a strategic part of God’s self-revelation. . . . As we noted earlier, a modern tendency is to regard the message of the historical literature as being the role models offered by the persons who cross its pages. In contrast, as God’s self-revelation, its intention is to convey instruction about and knowledge of God. . . . Some readers are inclined to look for new insights and lessons in each account. But rather [look for] patterns, themes, and motifs that we ought to see as weaving the historical tapestry into a picture of the sovereign God of the covenant. The significance of each thread is the contribution it makes to the tapestry. . . . The narratives must be approached through their context, and God must be seen as the focus.¹⁷

Using Robinson’s concepts of grammatical subject and complete subject for the creation of theological messages,¹⁸ “God” or “the LORD” should be the grammatical subject of an

¹⁵ While what I call an “exegetical-theological message” and what Mathewson and Robinson call an “exegetical (big) idea” of an Old Testament narrative will generally look very different, these terms are functionally equivalent, because Mathewson and Robinson believe that “exegetical (big) ideas” are statements of an Old Testament narrative’s theology as conveyed to the original audience. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, 85–90; Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 103–4. Robinson appears to understand the difference between a text’s exegetical idea and its *exegetical theology*, but does not seem to distinguish the two in practice (compare *Biblical Preaching*, 89–90 with 75 and Robinson’s contribution in Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, 210–11).

¹⁶ J. Gordon McConville and Philip E. Satterthwaite, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 21.

¹⁷ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 211.

¹⁸ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 41. Robinson’s term is “big idea,” not “theological message.” I prefer not to use the term “big idea,” because for biblical narratives (and other genres), there is a categorical difference between an “exegetical (big) idea”—i.e., a succinct plot summary—and an

Old Testament narrative's theological message and the complete subject should pertain to God's nature or covenant-keeping. As table 1.1 demonstrates, Mathewson tends to put human beings or their actions, not God—his nature or covenant-keeping—as the subject.

The third flaw of Mathewson's approach is that it fails to consider the limitations that the historical context of Old Testament narratives place on their potential range of meanings. William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, echoing E. D. Hirsch, state, "Any appraisal of 'meaning' then, must take into consideration this complex coalition of text, author, and audience. . . . Knowing all the conditions that surround the recipients of the original message provides further insight into how [the original audience] most likely understood the message."¹⁹ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart write, "*A text cannot mean what it never meant.* Or to put it in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text . . . is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken."²⁰ Robinson concurs. "I cannot make [a] passage mean something that it did not mean in principle in the ancient world. . . . I have to be honest with the text before I can come over to the contemporary world."²¹ Commenting on the narratives of Genesis, Sidney Greidanus writes, "A frequently overlooked dimension of historical interpretation is the historical situation of the original readers Knowing the situation of the first

exegetical-theological message. Some have tried to combine the two, but in my experience doing so is pedagogically ineffective.

¹⁹ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 9–11. See also E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 47.

²⁰ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 30 (emphasis theirs).

²¹ Haddon Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 308.

recipients . . . is of crucial importance for catching the relevance of . . . narratives.”²²

Whether written to Israel before, during, or after its control of the Promised Land, Old Testament narratives teach something about God—his nature or covenant-keeping—to meet Israel’s need to exclusively trust in the one true God.²³ Yaira Amit writes that

it seems reasonable to assume that the authors of biblical narratives believed that if they told their flock about God’s mighty deeds—how God saved the people in times of distress, how their fate was in God’s hands, and how it paid to obey God—then the community of worshipers would keep its side of the covenant and remain faithful to God.²⁴

Having looked at the first obstacle—the influence of inaccurate hermeneutical models by evangelical authors—attention turns to the second obstacle that accounts for the reason that many evangelical preachers fail to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. The second obstacle is the lack of accessible reference tools that enable preachers to discern the theological messages of Old Testament narratives. As necessary as scholarly commentaries are, for example, they often do not contain the information that preachers need. Robinson laments that “many of the commentaries explain the particulars but don’t tell you the universals. That is, they tell you about the individual words and phrases but don’t trace the argument of the passage.”²⁵ Other

²² Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 33.

²³ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 34–38. Note that ancient Israel was not in need of another set of primary texts for ethical instruction. The Old Testament Law existed. This does not mean that ethics are not taught in Old Testament narratives, only that they are tertiary and require careful analysis to discern. For a helpful study on discerning authorially intended ethics in Old Testament narratives, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004). For a brief, fascinating, and eerily contemporary summary of the reasons why Israel was so tempted to dabble in idolatry, see Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 450–54.

²⁴ Yaira Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 2.

²⁵ Haddon Robinson, “Better Big Ideas,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 355–56.

scholarly commentaries contain some or all of the necessary information, but pack it deep within their exegesis. A. A. Anderson's commentary on 2 Samuel 11–12 in the Word Biblical Commentary series helps preachers realize that these chapters form a single *pericope*, but shares little else that contributes to an understanding of the passage's theological message.²⁶ David Firth's commentary on 1–2 Samuel in the Apollos Old Testament Commentary series is more useful to preachers. Firth explains that 2 Samuel 11–12 is a pericope, that the chapter is designed to explain why God continues to use a king like David, but not one like Saul, that the answer is David's repentance, and that Solomon's birth and David's military victory confirm that God continues to use David to fulfill his purposes. These insights, however, are found within twenty pages of exegesis that include a new translation, discussion of textual variants, and comments on source-critical questions.²⁷

To aid evangelical pastors in delivering expository messages from Old Testament narratives, this thesis-project includes the creation of a user-friendly reference tool that aids preachers in delivering expository messages from Old Testament narratives. The reference tool contains three chapters: one that explains what it takes to preach with biblical authority, one that provides a step-by-step methodology for moving from Old

²⁶ A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 150–69, esp. 152. To be clear, I find most scholarly commentaries on Old Testament narratives, including Anderson's, to be very useful for preachers in other ways, e.g., in helping them understand issues of intertextuality and plot dynamics.

²⁷ David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 412–31. Again, to be clear, Firth's commentary is not only excellent; it is sensitive to the needs of expository preachers. Nevertheless, it is still difficult for many preachers, especially those who are not adequately trained in Old Testament narrative hermeneutics, to use it to discern the theological messages of the narratives in 1–2 Sam.

Testament narrative text to *Take-Home Truth*, and one that gives a commentary for 2 Samuel 11–12 which exemplifies the approach of the middle chapter.

The question remains whether the reference tool will persuade and equip evangelical preachers to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. Since it takes time for pastors to successfully incorporate new hermeneutical methods into their sermon preparation, the project tests how effective the reference tool is in immediately enhancing evangelical pastors' ability to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. The following question, therefore, drives the thesis-project.

Research Question

Will the reference tool immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives?

Thesis

My thesis is that the reference tool will immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. As I will expound on in the following chapters, to test this thesis I surveyed thirteen current evangelical pastors and exposed them to my reference tool using 2 Samuel 11–12 as a test case. To test the thesis, the survey had participants answer (1) similar pre-reading and post-reading questions on the interpretation and application of 2 Samuel 11–12 and (2) a post-reading question on the likelihood of them using the reference tool's approach to Old Testament narratives in the future. The thesis will be proven true if a majority of the participants indicate that they are persuaded by the reference tool's approach and give

evidence of greater hermeneutical accuracy in their answers to certain post-reading questions.

Assumptions

Two assumptions guide this research. The first is that many evangelical preachers, because of their view of Scripture, desire to practice expository preaching. The second is that many evangelical preachers fail to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. These assumptions are sufficiently attested to and proving them is outside the scope of the thesis-project. I believe these assumptions to be true based on my experience listening to hundreds of sermons on Old Testament narratives in churches, at conferences, on the radio, and online at <http://www.preachingtoday.com> and <http://www.sermoncentral.com>.

Organization

The remaining chapters of the thesis-project include a theological framework, literature review, project design, and outcomes.

Chapter two, the theological framework, develops my theology of preaching. My theology of preaching is that preachers ought to deliver expositions of biblical texts, because it is the only reliable way to proclaim God or his will. I elaborate on this by explaining my position on God's nature and revelation with an emphasis on biblical authority. First, I establish that God is Wholly Other, and therefore human beings are unable to comprehend anything about God unless he communicates revelation to them. Second, I argue that God is a communicative, trinitarian being who reveals himself to

human beings, thereby making true knowledge of God and true communication possible. Third, I demonstrate that God's revelation is ectypal in nature, being a true, but accommodated version of its archetype. Fourth, I discuss general and special revelation, the normative locus of which is Scripture. Fifth, I discuss theoretical biblical authority in light of tradition, reason, and experience, concluding that Scripture alone is the final authority in theology. Finally, I address functional biblical authority by demonstrating that a sermon must be hermeneutically sound in order for it to carry the weight of biblical authority.

Chapter three is a literature review of three topics: contemporary theories of interpretation, Old Testament narrative art, and pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives. These are interdisciplinary topics, so the focus of the literature review is on those strands that are important for the preaching of Old Testament narratives.

Chapter four, the project design, describes the thesis-project's methods. Research was conducted for the purpose of creating a user-friendly reference tool (see Appendix C) that enables evangelical preachers to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. A survey, using the online survey creation tool at <http://www.surveygizmo.com> was used to test the thesis. The survey took a pre-test and post-test approach. The participants, current evangelical pastors, (1) read and answered pre-reading questions on 2 Samuel 11–12 to establish their pre-reading ability to interpret and apply Old Testament narratives, (2) became exposed to proper Old Testament narrative hermeneutics through the reading of the reference tool, (3) answered a post-reading question to see if they are persuaded by the reference tool's approach, and (4) answered

post-reading questions that are similar to certain pre-reading questions to determine how well the pastors were equipped.

Chapter five summarizes and analyzes the results of the survey to see if they validate the thesis. Conclusions are reached on the future usefulness and application of the thesis-project.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter develops my theology of preaching. My theology of preaching is that preachers ought to deliver expositions of biblical texts, because it is the only reliable way to proclaim God or his will. I will develop my theology of preaching by explaining my positions on God's nature, God's revelation, and biblical authority.

God's Nature

My theology of preaching begins with the recognition that God is Wholly Other. The difference between God and human beings is one of an “infinite qualitative distinction.”¹ Ontologically, God is an eternally existing being who requires nothing outside of himself to maintain his existence and operate at full strength. He is omnipresent, wherein his entire being, the totality of himself, is present everywhere though independent of creation and physically present nowhere.² Gerald Bray writes, “In his being (or essence) he is completely different from us or from anything else in the created order, and is therefore fundamentally unknowable.”³

Knowledge of God is possible, however, because God is a personal, triune being who reveals himself. His triune nature is such that he is of one substance (*homoousios*) and three persons (*hypostases*): Father, Son, and Spirit. That he is personal is seen in his

¹ Karl Barth, “Karl Barth on the ‘Otherness’ of God,” in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister E. McGrath, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 217.

² John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 239–64. See also Ps 90:1–2; Ps 139:7–15; Jer 23:24; John 4:24; Acts 17:23–25.

³ Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 110.

desire to communicate and fellowship within himself and with pre- and post-fall human beings.⁴ A barrier to God-human fellowship is the inability of human beings, because of their finitude, to perceive God apart from revelation. John Calvin states that God’s “essence is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception.”⁵ God overcomes this barrier by revealing himself to human beings.

God’s personal, triune nature is crucial to preaching for two reasons. First, it ensures that preachers have something to preach about God and his will. Second, it means that it is possible for people to understand God’s revelation and communicate it to others.

Kevin Vanhoozer notes:

The Trinity thus serves the role of what Kant calls a “transcendental condition”: a necessary condition for the possibility of something humans experience but cannot otherwise explain, namely, the experience of meaningful communication. From a Christian perspective, God is first and foremost a communicative agent. . . . God’s very being is a self-communicative act that both constitutes and enacts the covenant of discourse: speaker (Father), Word (Son), and reception (Spirit) are all interrelated.⁶

God’s Revelation

Having seen that God is a triune, communicating being who cannot be perceived by human beings apart from revelation, this section discusses the nature of God’s revelation. God reveals himself to us through ectypal knowledge, a subset of archetypal knowledge. Archetypal knowledge is God’s knowledge. It is innate, requiring no

⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 201–3. See also John 14:8–26; Gen 1:27–28; Rom 3:21–26; 1 Cor 5:18–19; Rev 21:2–3.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, vol. 20–21, The Library of Christian Classics (London: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 52.

⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 456.

discovery or learning to obtain. It is perfect in that it aligns with reality and includes everything there is to know about all things actual or possible. It is conscious, being at the forefront of God's mind, informing all he does.⁷

Ectypal knowledge is the knowledge that God reveals to human beings.⁸ The working principle of ectypal knowledge is that of accommodation.⁹ Accommodation is divine rhetoric, God's way of communicating to finite human beings. Given that human beings would be unable to comprehend archetypal knowledge, God accommodates his revelation to human beings so that they can understand it. Calvin explains that “because our weakness does not attain to his exalted state, the description of him that is given to us must be accommodated to our capacity so that we may understand it. Now the mode of accommodation is for him to represent himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us.”¹⁰ Ectypal knowledge is an accurate but dim expression of its archetype.¹¹

God's communication of ectypal knowledge is a model for rhetorical preaching. Preaching, like trinitarian communication, should be true communication, not an instrument of domination or manipulation. Preaching should be truthful, because it is part of a God-human communication covenant, one in which God reveals himself with the expectation that preachers will respect him by trying to understand him according to the

⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 66.

⁸ Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), s.v. “Accommodation.”

⁹ Ford Lewis Battles, “God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 31 (1977): 33.

¹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 227.

¹¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 254–55.

manner of his revelation. Preaching should be communicated rhetorically to contemporary listeners just as God's revelation was to its original recipients, being clear enough for general audiences and substantial enough for mature listeners.¹²

General Revelation

There are two forms of ectypal knowledge: general and special revelation. Erickson defines general revelation as "God's communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places."¹³ In discussing general revelation's two most prominent loci, the physical world and the human conscience, Romans 1:18–25 and 2:12–16 teach that general revelation yields only rudimentary knowledge of God, renders people accountable to God, and is unable to bring about a saving knowledge of God.¹⁴ The limitations of general revelation should discourage preachers from using it as the primary source of their sermons, because it reveals minimal knowledge of God and his will. Polished or charismatic preachers may draw large crowds by preaching general revelation, but they risk spiritually impoverishing their listeners in the process.

Special Revelation

Special revelation is "God's manifestation of himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him."¹⁵ It is personal in that God, as Lord and Master, calls people into fellowship

¹² Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 456–57, 467n3.

¹³ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 178.

¹⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 194–99.

¹⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 201.

with himself.¹⁶ Acts 9:3–6 records such an encounter in the life of Paul:

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of personal revelation, being God incarnate.

Robert Jenson writes, “The risen Jesus is the Son as he is the Word, the self-introduction of the Father. . . . Jesus the Christ . . . is the Word of God because he is the narrative content of the word-event that is the Word of God.”¹⁷ Jesus puts it this way: “I and the Father are one.”¹⁸

Special revelation is also propositional. Propositional special revelation is necessary for two reasons. First, it reveals the theological content that is necessary for salvation. Paul writes, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? . . . So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”¹⁹ Second, it reveals knowledge of God’s will. Paul writes, “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”²⁰

¹⁶ Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), 109.

¹⁷ Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 165, 171.

¹⁸ John 10:30.

¹⁹ Rom 10:14ab, 17.

²⁰ Rom 7:7.

The normative locus of special revelation is Scripture. As the church fulfills its mission to proclaim the gospel, God gives the church Scripture so that it may judge what is or is not the gospel.²¹ Through canonization, the Church officially adopted the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible for what they already were.²² The personal and propositional nature of inscripturated revelation encourages preachers to make it the primary source for their sermons, because it promotes a divine-human encounter where the lost are converted and the converted grow in relationship with their Savior.

Inspiration

The principal characteristic of the Bible is that it is inspired by God.²³ Inspiration is defined as “that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record” of revelation.²⁴ The Bible does not elaborate on the method or methods of inspiration. What it teaches is that inspiration produces a divine instrument which God employs for the sanctification of his people.²⁵ In the words of Paul, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”²⁶

²¹ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 23.

²² John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 58.

²³ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 31.

²⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 225.

²⁵ B. B. Warfield, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed., s.v. “Inspiration”; Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 30–31.

²⁶ 2 Tim 3:16–17.

The inspiration of Scripture is critical to preaching, because it provides preachers with the opportunity to preach with God's authority. This is good news, because preachers—prone to sin and unable to discern the Wholly Other God or his will without revelation—have something reliable that they can preach about God and his will. Preachers, therefore, ought to take advantage of the opportunity afforded to them by the inspiration of Scripture by making use of the training and resources that are available to them so that they can, as accurately as possible, represent the God who entrusts them with his Word.²⁷

Inerrancy

Concomitant with inspiration is the inerrancy of Scripture. Inerrancy is the view that inscripturated revelation is true in everything that it teaches as true. This minimalist definition is helpful, because it takes inerrancy seriously while steering clear of controversial debates over technical issues.²⁸ Inerrancy is valuable because it gives preachers confidence in knowing that when they preach the Bible faithfully they are preaching something trustworthy and true.

Theoretical Biblical Authority

To this point, I have argued that since God is Wholly Other, human beings can have no knowledge of God or his will unless God reveals himself to them. Fortunately,

²⁷ James Andrews, "Why Theological Hermeneutics Needs Rhetoric," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 2 (April 2010): 198.

²⁸ For an introduction to the technical issues surrounding inerrancy, see Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity), 2004.

God is a personal, triune being who reveals himself through general and special revelation, the latter being inspired, inerrant, and necessary for salvation and knowledge of God's will that is reliable. The remainder of this theological framework discusses the authority of Scripture. Authority is "the right to command belief and/or action."²⁹ For many, that the Bible is God's Word does not mean that it is the final authority on theological matters. Michael Joseph Brown argues that

many people believe that the Bible ought to be the primary authority for a person's faith and witness, but there is a necessary limit to this authority. If you believe that the Bible is the only place from which you develop theology, then the Bible becomes the only proof necessary for the truth of that theology. This is . . . no better than a parent telling a child to do something "because I say so." You did not buy that reasoning when you were a child; why should you buy it now? The Bible's authority is a secondary authority. Therefore, merely to establish that an idea, practice, or assertion comes from the Bible or is supported by the Bible is not enough to authorize it as appropriate for people of faith.³⁰

So, then, a foundational question for preaching is: where does theological authority reside? To answer this question, I will first define theology. Second, I will discuss theoretical biblical authority with reference to extrabiblical sources of theology. Third, I will discuss functional biblical authority by examining the requirements for actualizing biblical authority in the pulpit. Preachers who are acquainted with these issues are in a better position to faithfully proclaim God and his Word.

Theology is the study of God's ectypal knowledge in Scripture for the purpose of manifesting right Christian belief and practice today.³¹ Theological conclusions are largely the product of the amount of authority, consciously or unconsciously, that people

²⁹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 268.

³⁰ Michael Joseph Brown, *What They Don't Tell You: A Survivor's Guide to Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 148.

³¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 22–24; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 39.

give to tradition, reason, and experience. These sources of theology overlap, making it difficult to know where one ends and another begins, but each is distinct enough to discuss individually.

Tradition

Tradition is a major contributor to theology. It should be. It is the body of Christian thought that has accumulated over time as a result of the various needs and challenges that the Church has faced. The creeds of the Apostles, Nicea, and Chalcedon are some of the most foundational expressions of the Christian faith. Denominations have doctrinal statements and resolutions on key issues. Scholars write commentaries on the biblical text. Ignoring tradition is foolish, especially if it leads to the rejection of the one true God. Theology is best learned deductively, starting with one's tradition and maturing through the study of Scripture. Preachers would do well to embrace the traditions with which they are familiar, but do so with an open mind so that over time they can confirm, deepen, or modify their views in light of Scripture.³²

The Church has always valued tradition. In the primitive church, its primary purpose was to keep people within the bounds of orthodoxy. Paul writes, “So, then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, *either by our spoken word or by our letter.*”³³ In the second century, Tertullian taught an early form of apostolic succession when he wrote that the distinguishing characteristic of orthodox

³² This statement embraces hermeneutical realism for no one learns theology in an inductive manner, coming to the Bible as it were in an unbiased manner with a blank theological slate, equipped with excellent hermeneutical skills. On the role of the interpreter's preunderstanding in the interpretive process, see William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 2004), 154–68.

³³ 2 Thess 2:15 (emphasis added).

churches, in contrast to heretical ones, is that they can demonstrate that their bishopric was established by the apostles in accordance with their “*living voice*, and subsequently through their letters.”³⁴ Over time, ecclesiastical tradition grew beyond its need to maintain orthodoxy, eventually becoming codified. In the case of apostolic succession, it grew to become the basis of the papacy of the Roman bishop, papal infallibility, and the need to be a part of the Roman Catholic Church for salvation.

Tradition becomes a problem when it serves as the principal interpreter of Scripture. The Catholic Catechism states, “Through Tradition, the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.”³⁵ Jesus, however, teaches that Scripture is superior to tradition:

And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, ‘Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’’ (that is, given to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”³⁶

Many *evangelical*³⁷ preachers criticize Roman Catholicism’s view of tradition. In Matthew 7:1–5, however, Jesus exhorts believers to examine themselves before they point out the faults of others. Evangelical preachers, therefore, need to grow in self-awareness and in

³⁴ Tertullian, “Tertullian on Tradition and Apostolic Succession,” in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister E. McGrath, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 79 (emphasis added).

³⁵ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 25.

³⁶ Mark 7:9–12.

³⁷ Terms that are defined in the Glossary of the thesis-project (see page vii) are italicized the first time they appear in the body of a chapter.

their ability to interpret Scripture so that they can avoid hypocrisy and heterodoxy in their preaching.

Reason

Reason, too, is essential for theology. Preachers should use deductive logic, as Jesus did in Mark 7:9–12, to move from theological principle to *application*. Reason is helpful for understanding the relationship between doctrines such as faith and works.³⁸

Reason becomes a problem when it is used as a grid for establishing theological truth. This use of reason became popular during the Enlightenment. For Enlightenment theologians looking to save Christianity, biblical teachings only contributed to theology when they conformed to a grid of their choosing, something they believed to be more self-evidently true. For Friedrich Schleiermacher, it was feeling and intuition. For Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack, it was their sense of morality.³⁹ The selection of different grids and the conclusions reached because of them led to charges that theology was anthropology in disguise. Ludwig Feuerbach argues that God is merely a mental projection of our hopes and needs:

*Consciousness of God is human self-consciousness; knowledge of God is human self-knowledge. . . . However, to characterize the consciousness of God as human self-consciousness in this manner does not mean that religious people are themselves immediately aware of the fact that their consciousness of God is simply their own self-consciousness. In fact, the absence of such an awareness is the distinctive mark of religion.*⁴⁰

³⁸ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 282–83.

³⁹ Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 39–60.

⁴⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, “Ludwig Feuerbach on the Origins of Religion,” in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister E. McGrath, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 574 (emphasis present in source).

The Enlightenment's approach to theology is nothing new. In the first century, some in the church at Corinth desired to make the Christian faith palatable to their peers by conforming it to the accepted wisdom of their culture. They struggled, for example, with the need to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul responded to the Corinthians by using reason, not to establish doctrine, but to argue against using reason as a doctrinal grid. In 1 Corinthians 1:18–3:23, Paul teaches that it is not uncommon for unbelievers to find elements of the Christian faith unacceptable, but that God saves people through the gospel that believers today find in Scripture.

Preachers need to examine the influence of their culture's worldview on their interpretation of Scripture. For example, application is important, but preachers must be careful not to sacrifice at the altar of the cultural god of relevance by preaching “apparent surface ‘lesson[s]’ of the text”—i.e., anthropological mental projections—that narrow “the revelational scope of the text.”⁴¹

The Enlightenment's use of reason, however, has made a positive contribution to theology. The eagerness of Enlightenment theologians to reinterpret the Christian faith created a safer environment for many exegetes to reexamine biblical passages in light of what is believed to be known outside of Scripture to see if certain long-held interpretations are justified. When preachers have a thoroughgoing acquaintance with fields like science, economics, history, and philosophy in addition to biblical studies, they are in a position to both ask hard questions of the Bible and get accurate answers from the Bible so that they may more faithfully proclaim God and his will.

⁴¹ Carl G. Kromminga, “Remember Lot's Wife: Preaching Old Testament Narrative Texts,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 18, no. 1 (April 1983): 28.

Experience

Experience also contributes to theology. It is a product of one's relationships, education, intelligence, and temperament. It has both informational and attitudinal components.⁴² In John 18–21, Peter's experiences change his messianic theology. In 18:10, Peter's experience leads him to brazenly attack the high priest's servant in defense of Jesus. In 18:25–26, a shift occurs in Peter's messianic theology after the experience of seeing Jesus arrested. In 21:7–19, Peter's messianic theology is forever changed after his experience with the resurrected Christ. Today, preachers, like all believers, have an experience unlike anything the world can manufacture: an encounter with the risen Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As Peter did, when people encounter the risen Christ at conversion they have sufficient proof that "he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."⁴³

The study of experience has led to the realization that human beings are not detached, neutral interpreters. This realization leads Hans-Georg Gadamer to formalize an approach to interpretation that understands the readers' experience and texts as co-determiners of meaning. Theology, therefore, is a product of one's encounter with the text.⁴⁴ Gadamer's approach has three problems as it relates to theology. First, it makes no distinction between God's revelation and our experience. It intentionally puts errant human experience on par with God's revelation, thus demoting God's Word and promoting self. Second, it makes it impossible to distinguish between true and false

⁴² Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 154–55.

⁴³ Heb 11:6b; Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 79. See also 1 Cor 12:13; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 601–6.

⁴⁴ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 106–7.

doctrine, for “each moment of reading can produce a new and innovative” theology.⁴⁵

Third, it is overly pessimistic in that it denies that human beings can discern objective theology from biblical texts. Jesus’ interaction with Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus displays a truer reality, namely, that apprehending objective theology can be difficult, but it is possible.⁴⁶

Preachers need to critically reflect on their preaching. Through uncritical reflection, younger preachers may conclude that *expository preaching* is not worth the effort. They may have grown up or experienced conversion in a fruitful church where the pastor preached from the Bible, but not with the same precision that the younger preachers’ homiletics professors rightfully would have liked. Older preachers, whether satisfied or a little cynical after experiencing years of ministry, might conclude that it is not necessary to make changes to their preaching that reflect the contribution of genre to hermeneutics and communication. Regardless, preachers of all ages need to take God’s communication covenant seriously by taking advantage of training that is available to them so that they can preach *expository messages* from all biblical genres.

Sola Scriptura

Implicit in this discussion of sources of theology is the principle of *sola scriptura*. *Sola scriptura* is an outflow of trinitarianism. It asserts that true communication is possible, because God reveals himself to human beings and they are able to understand

⁴⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 471. For a secular critique of Gadamer, see E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 245–64.

⁴⁶ Luke 24:13–35.

it.⁴⁷ Known as the formal principle of the Protestant Reformation, it is the conviction “that the church’s authority is only the Holy Scriptures and not ecclesiastical traditions or human opinions.”⁴⁸ When conflicts arise between extrabiblical sources of theology and Scripture, preachers must give pride of place to Scripture. Keith Mathison notes that influences like tradition, reason, and experience all matter. They should not be ignored, but neither should they take priority in theology:

In the same way we may say that our final authority is Scripture alone, but not a Scripture that is alone. Scripture alone is the source of revelation. Scripture alone is inspired and inherently infallible. Scripture alone is the supreme normative standard. But Scripture does not exist in a vacuum. . . . There are other real authorities [but they are] are subordinate and derivative in nature.⁴⁹

Preachers, therefore, must heed the advice of John Goldingay who says that Scripture needs to be preached

out of a situation that enables them to hear aspects of its message that the church has often missed, but this also opens them up to the danger of missing what at first sight does not correspond to their concerns or ignoring what does not directly confirm their convictions. Current Christian praxis suggests the questions with which the interpreter comes to scripture; these questions are an inevitable and right starting point for interpretation, but they must be open to refinement on the basis of what we discover in scripture.⁵⁰

Functional Biblical Authority

Functional biblical authority refers to the putting of theoretical biblical authority into practice. Theology is, necessarily, a human endeavor. Mathison observes that no one “asserts that a Bible can enter a pulpit and preach itself. No one asserts that a Bible can

⁴⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 456.

⁴⁸ McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, “Sola Scriptura.”

⁴⁹ Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2001), 259–60.

⁵⁰ John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 244.

read itself. Scripture cannot be interpreted or preached apart from the involvement of some human agency.”⁵¹ Preaching with a theoretical commitment to biblical authority is an exercise in self-deception if it is not accompanied by a commitment to functional biblical authority. Functional biblical authority requires the use of sound hermeneutics. The use of sound hermeneutics enables preachers to overcome historical, cultural, linguistic, literary, geographical, and, in many cases, covenantal challenges to the interpretation and application of Scripture.⁵²

Functional Biblical Authority in Interpretation

Preaching with hermeneutical soundness begins with interpretation. Interpretation refers to anything that people *say* or *write* about a text’s background, design, or intent. It can include comments on historical context, literary artistry, grammatical constructions, or theology. It is dependent upon, but different than understanding in that the latter refers to a person’s pre-verbal conceptions.⁵³ As those who teach preaching to seminarians know well, preachers with an accurate mental understanding of a passage do not always communicate their understanding.

For preaching, the primary goal of interpretation is to discern the *exegetical theology* and write the *exegetical-theological message* of the text. Reaching exegetical-theological conclusions requires an analysis of how biblical texts communicate their messages. William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard write that there are three

⁵¹ Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 259.

⁵² Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 13–17, 154–168, esp. 167.

⁵³ Robert H. Stein, *Playing by the Rules: A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 48–49.

components of communication: words, genre, and message. “Words” refers to what is said, “genre” to the way it is said, and “message” to the purpose or reason for saying it.⁵⁴ In communication, words and genre are tools for communicating messages. When people choose to communicate, they determine the message, then how to say it (genre), and, finally, its linguistic content and grammar (words). Notice in table 2.1 that in some genres the words of the biblical text are similar to the words of the exegetical-theological message and in other genres they are quite different.

Table 2.1. Three Components of Communication

Genre	Words	Exegetical-Theological Message
Epistolary	Do not get drunk on wine (Eph 5:18a).	Do not get drunk on wine.
Imperative		
Parable	The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When found, the finder hides it in field, sells everything he has, and buys the field (Matt 13:44).	Join the kingdom of heaven; it is more valuable than anything else.
Lament Psalm	God why do you hide? The wicked are prospering. God fix the problem. God is great (Ps 10).	When feeling like God is hiding in the midst of an unjust trial, Israel <i>can</i> call on God to fix the problem and, when it does, do it while maintaining full confidence that God is great.
OT Narrative	After the flood, people do not disperse, endangering and defying God’s redemptive plans, so God disperses them (Gen 11:1–9).	It is futile to defy God’s redemptive plans, because God’s redemptive plans will prevail.

Of special note here is the need for preachers to pay close attention to the influence of genre in interpretation. Genre informs the reader of how to make sense of words. Words and grammar alone cannot convey meaning. Take the phrase “I am bad.” The words are familiar, but what do they mean? If intended ironically, they mean, “I think I am cool.” If meant as a mocking insult, they mean, “The person I am speaking about thinks he is cool, but he is not.” If they are a heartfelt confession, they mean, “I believe that I am a bad person.”

⁵⁴ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 169.

A few years ago, preachers saw the effects of misreading genre signals in popular culture. *The Da Vinci Code* caused quite a stir, because many read it more like a work of history than what it is, a novel. The gullible public, unfamiliar with fiction's tools of the trade and unversed in historical Jesus studies, misread the book, making its author a very rich man.⁵⁵ If misreading genre clues in secular literature can have deleterious effects, how much more when biblical literature is preached?

Functional Biblical Authority in Application

Pulpit speech is not a sermon without application. For preaching, the primary goal for application is to discern the *pericopal theology* and write the pericopal-theological message of the text. Abraham Kuruvilla writes,

the theology of the *pericope* . . . portrays God and the relationship he intends to have with his people. . . . Pericopal theology thus bears potential for the realization of God's kingdom; it is an eschatological concept, not yet completely fulfilled or operative until actualized by the Christian living a life that is lived in accord with the demands of God. . . . A response . . . is thus essential, for [pericopal theology] beckons and awaits an answer. Indeed, the text demands to be appropriated in this fashion, for Scripture . . . seeks the readers' subjection.⁵⁶

Preaching with biblical authority requires that the sermon's actionable exhortations and exemplifications be deduced from the pericopal theology of the preaching text(s).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, "The Da Vinci Code: A Novel," review of *The Da Vinci Code: A Novel*, *Denver Journal*, January 1, 2004, accessed August 13, 2011, <http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/the-da-vinci-code-a-novel/>.

⁵⁶ Abraham Kuruvilla, "Pericopal Theology: An Intermediary Between Text and Application," *Trinity Journal* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 272–73 (emphasis added).

⁵⁷ For philosophical, theological, and homiletical reasons why preachers ought to show how (pericopal) theology can be *performed* by believers, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Stephen C. Barton, "New Testament Interpretation as Performance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 2 (1999): 179–208; Daniel Overdorf, *Applying the Sermon: How to Balance Biblical Integrity and Cultural Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 19–100; Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 106–11. For

Haddon Robinson speaks of the “heresy of application” by so many well-intentioned preachers who unconsciously reject biblical authority in application:

More heresy is preached in application than in Bible exegesis. Preachers want to be faithful to the Scriptures, and going through Seminary, they have learned exegesis. But they may not have firmly learned how to make the journey from the biblical text to the modern world. . . . The long-term effect is that we preach . . . myth[s].⁵⁸

Furthermore, Robinson calls misapplication “a rape of the Bible. You’re saying what God doesn’t say. Through this process you undermine the Scriptures. Ultimately, people come to believe that anything with a biblical flavor is what God says.”⁵⁹ Application requires that preachers build structurally sound hermeneutical bridges from the “there and then” of the theological message to the “here and now” of the *Take-Home Truth*.

Formulating Exegetical- and Pericopal-Theological Messages

Once a pericope has been studied, preachers need to formulate its exegetical-theological message. Many preachers skip this step, confident that they are firmly anchored in the text. Skipping this step, however, increases the likelihood that the sermon will veer into textually or biblically unwarranted misapplications.

Table 2.2. Exegetical-Theological and Pericopal-Theological Messages of 2 Sam 11–12

Exegetical-Theological Message ^a	<u>The LORD</u> will use <u>repentant kings of Israel</u> to fulfill the <u>Davidic Covenant</u> , but <u>despising</u> the <u>LORD’s word</u> brings discipline.
Pericopal-Theological Message ^b	<u>God</u> uses <u>us</u> to fulfill his <u>plan of salvation</u> , but <u>sin</u> brings discipline.

^a Underlined words reflect time-specific expressions of timeless realities.

^b Underlined words reflect timeless realities of their time-specific expressions.

how-to advice, see Overdorf, *Applying the Sermon*, 101–76; Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, 112–27; Appendix D (page 143) of the thesis-project.

⁵⁸ Haddon Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 306–7.

⁵⁹ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 307.

The next step is to turn the exegetical-theological message into a pericopal-theological message. With the exception of those for many Old Testament laws, the structure of a pericopal-theological message should closely parallel the structure of its exegetical-theological message with the difference in content reflecting the timeless nature of the pericopal-theological message.⁶⁰

This step often involves the building of three hermeneutically sound bridges.⁶¹ These bridges overlap, but can be discussed individually. The first is the progressive revelation bridge. Progressive revelation is the concept that God reveals or develops many truths over time.⁶² For example, much of what is in the Old Testament reflects the belief that the afterlife holds no promise of reward or punishment.⁶³ This explains why Israel expected the retribution principle to be carried out in this life. The retribution principle is the “conviction that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer, both in proportion to [people’s] respective righteousness and wickedness.”⁶⁴ When preaching Psalm 1, for example, the preacher needs to construct a progressive revelation

⁶⁰ Unlike Old Testament narratives, Old Testament laws convey their messages in a straightforward fashion. Many times, however, their exegetical-theological messages and pericopal-theological messages will not be parallel in structure, because the primary application of many Old Testament laws today is different than it was prior to the first coming of Christ. See Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 341–51.

⁶¹ This is a similar concept to what is commonly called “the ladder of abstraction.” In principle, the ladder of abstraction is valid. Too often, however, invalid connections are made, because of poor hermeneutical thinking. When moving from a time-specific term in an exegetical-theological message to its timeless equivalent in the pericopal-theological message, a valid hermeneutical link must be made. See footnote 65 below.

⁶² Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 122.

⁶³ Philip S. Johnston, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, s.v. “Afterlife.” According to Johnston, this aspect of the afterlife is not revealed until Dan 12:2, the last chapter of a book with one of the latest original composition dates in the Old Testament.

⁶⁴ John H. Walton, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, s.v. “Retribution.”

bridge for 1:5, because textually the reference is to an earthly judgment that represents God's ultimate judgment.⁶⁵

The second hermeneutical bridge is the Old Covenant-New Covenant bridge. Accurate pericopal-theological messages of many Old Testament pericopes require preachers to recognize that God's people today operate under the New Covenant. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus teaches that he fulfills the Old Covenant. One implication of this, as seen in Hebrews 8:7–13, is that the New Covenant that was prophesied to Israel in Jeremiah 31:31–34 is now in force, rendering the Old Covenant obsolete.⁶⁶ When preaching 2 Samuel 11–12, the preacher needs to construct an Old Covenant-New Covenant bridge, because textually its message pertains to the kind of sinful king of Israel that God will use to fulfill the Davidic Covenant. The king of Israel, however, is God's ambassador (in the New Testament sense of the word) and the Davidic Covenant is one stage in God's plan of salvation.⁶⁷

The third hermeneutical bridge is the cultural bridge. This bridge is necessary, because many things in Scripture reflect cultural expressions of timeless realities. When preaching from the Old Testament prophets, preachers need to construct a cultural bridge when the prophets speak of horses, chariots, spears, and swords, because these are

⁶⁵ Samuel L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 74–76; Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 98–99. Following the discussion above in footnote 61, though Ps 1:5 refers to an earthly gathering of God's people, one cannot move up on the “ladder of abstraction” to church gatherings today. This is because the earthly gathering referred to in the text is not representative of a gathered community of God's people, but of God's ultimate judgment. Wilson, *Psalms*, 98–99.

⁶⁶ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 198–99.

⁶⁷ For a hermeneutical justification, see Appendix C, particularly pages 137–38; 141–42 of the thesis-project.

cultural expressions of timeless realities.⁶⁸ Cultural bridges can also be necessary when preaching New Testament texts. When Paul exhorts believers to “greet one another with a holy kiss,”⁶⁹ he is instructing his readers to greet their fellow believers in a culturally acceptable way that reflects their shared status as fellow members of God’s family.⁷⁰

Formulating Take-Home Truths

Following Donald Sunukjian’s homiletic, once the exegetical- and pericopal-theological messages have been written, the preacher needs to determine the Take-Home Truth.⁷¹ For “one-point” sermons, the pericopal-theological message should suffice. For “multi-point” sermons, the preacher needs to determine the pericope’s dominant theological idea. “To determine the [Take-Home Truth] of [a] passage—and to form the single sentence that captures the essential core of what the author is saying—ask, ‘What is the largest question that is being answered through this flow of thought?’ . . . Then ask, ‘What is the answer to this question?’” This, then, becomes the organizing idea of the sermon.⁷²

⁶⁸ Context will determine the timeless reality that a time-specific cultural expression represents. Often individual words, e.g., chariots and swords, are not individually representative of anything, but are used in conjunction with other images to paint a picture of a particular concept (e.g., warfare) or as a way of saying that God is free to use any number of methods to carry out his punishment or discipline. See D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002). Greidanus writes, “This historically and culturally conditioned form is completely overlooked when people in all seriousness propose that the prophets predict for our time . . . a final battle with horses and chariots and spears and swords.” Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 231–32.

⁶⁹ Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26. For a Peterine example, see 1 Pet 5:14.

⁷⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 836.

⁷¹ Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, 74.

⁷² Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, 192, 224.

This chapter has laid the thesis-project's theological foundation by demonstrating through a study of God's nature, God's revelation, and biblical authority that preachers ought to deliver expositions of biblical texts, because it is the only reliable way to proclaim God or his will. The next chapter is a literature review of contemporary theories of interpretation, Old Testament narrative art, and pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives for the purpose of showing what it takes to preach expositions of Old Testament narratives.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a literature review of three topics: (1) contemporary theories of interpretation, (2) Old Testament narrative art, and (3) *pericopal theology*¹ of Old Testament narratives. These are interdisciplinary topics, so the focus of the literature review is on those strands that are important for preaching Old Testament narratives. Competence in these topics enhances the ability of preachers to deliver *expository messages* from Old Testament narratives by enabling preachers to more consciously and faithfully move from text to *Take-Home Truth*.

Contemporary Theories of Interpretation

Interpretational theory is directly related to hermeneutics. In his definition of hermeneutics, Anthony Thiselton writes that hermeneutics is the “critical reflection upon processes of interpretation and understanding, especially the interpretation of biblical texts or texts that originate from within other cultures.”² It is the study of the relationship of authors, texts, and readers in the pursuit of interpretation and contemporary relevance. Jeannine Brown notes that while hermeneutics is a philosophical and practical discipline, books on the subject tend to emphasize one or the other.³ First coined by J. C. Dannhauer

¹ Terms that are defined in the Glossary of the thesis-project (see page vii) are italicized the first time they appear in the body of a chapter.

² Anthony C. Thiselton, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N.T. Wright, s.v. “Hermeneutics.”

³ Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 20–21.

in 1653,⁴ John Barton writes that hermeneutics became an independent discipline in the early 1800s when Friedrich Schleiermacher began to investigate the impact of biases and circumstances in the interpretive process.⁵ Prior to that time, hermeneutics pertained to the principles of interpretation with the goal of discovering the literal sense of Scripture via authorial intention.⁶ Thiselton notes that Scripture had other senses, but they were to derive from the literal sense. Confident in the clarity of Scripture, Luther and Calvin successfully campaigned against the other senses, because of the spurious conclusions that were often reached through their use.⁷

Today, hermeneutical battles revolve around the possibility of communication. Authorial-intention theories claim that communication is possible. Other theories doubt that authors can express themselves completely and that readers can interpret authors accurately. In some theories, seeking meaning in authorial intention is foolish, because communication and interpretation are agenda driven and manipulative.⁸ The remaining discussion of this topic is a review of four types of interpretive theories: (1) authorial-intention theories, (2) text-centered theories, (3) reader-response theories, and (4) ideological theories.

⁴ Thiselton, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, s.v. “Hermeneutics.”

⁵ John Barton, “Introduction,” ed. John Barton, in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N.T. Wright, s.v. “Intention/Intentional Fallacy.”

⁷ Thiselton, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, s.v. “Hermeneutics.” This is not to say that Luther never resorted to allegory.

⁸ Alexander S. Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics: SCM Core Text* (London: SCM, 2007), 196–97.

Authorial-Intention Theories

This section provides a review of recent trends in authorial-intention theories. It will enable preachers to more consciously assess the value of authorial-intention theories for *expository preaching*, especially as it relates to speech-act theory and E. D. Hirsch's terms "significance" and "implication."

Authorial-intention theories are rooted in the idea that communication, even transcultural communication, is possible and desirable. Kevin Vanhoozer believes that communication is possible, because God is a communicating agent. Communication is desirable, because human beings have a responsibility to accept the God who speaks.⁹ E. D. Hirsch values authorial intention, because it promotes a virtuous culture¹⁰ and provides the basis for historical scholarship. "In academic criticism, the significance and use of a text ought to be rooted in its fixed meaning, since otherwise criticism would lack a stable object of inquiry."¹¹

Authorial-intention theorists seek the author's meaning in different places. Schleiermacher's contemporary Wilhelm Dilthey sought meaning in the author's mind.¹² While Hirsch does not doubt the existence of mental intention, he believes that it is only recoverable in verbal meaning. "Most of us would answer that the author's meaning is only partially accessible to an interpreter. . . . The interpretation of texts is concerned

⁹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 456.

¹⁰ E. D. Hirsch, "The Politics of Theories of Interpretation," in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 329–30.

¹¹ E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 17–18.

¹² Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Life-Expressions," in *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, ed. Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 1992), 229.

exclusively with sharable meanings, and not everything I am thinking of when I write can be shared with others by means of my words.”¹³ William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard agree and thus refer to their approach as “author-centered textual meaning.”¹⁴

Grant Osborne believes that speech-act theory enriches Hirsch’s position.¹⁵ Speech-act theory posits that communication contains three types of acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Locutionary acts refer to the meaning of sentences at the propositional level. Illocutionary acts refer to what sentences accomplish (e.g., the making of an assertion, promise, or prediction). Perlocutionary acts refer “to the intended effects of the speech act” (e.g., persuasion or teaching).¹⁶ Regarding the second, illocutionary acts, Vanhoozer argues that biblical texts have four illocutionary factors: (1) proposition, or linguistic content, (2) purpose, or message intended by the linguistic content, (3) presence, or genre that the message is couched in, and (4) power, or *pathos* of the message.¹⁷

Christian authorial-intention theorists struggle to understand and appropriate Hirsch’s use of “significance.” Hirsch, a secular theorist, popularized the distinction between meaning and significance. Osborne writes that he, like Walter Kaiser and

¹³ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 18.

¹⁴ William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 2004), 186.

¹⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 23.

¹⁶ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 502.

¹⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture’s Diverse Literary Forms,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie, 1986), 376–78.

Thiselton, finds Hirsch's view of significance underdeveloped, because "it is by no means clear how [in Hirsch's view] one adjudicates between meaning and significance."¹⁸ Hirsch's concept of significance, however, is clear. Significance is whatever the interpreter determines it to be; it is "limitless."¹⁹ For Hirsch, meaning is fixed. Once meaning is understood, people are free to judge it and decide for themselves what to do with it. Hirsch writes:

But one great difference justifies a stricter definition for the purpose of analysis: when we construe another's meaning we are not free agents. . . . Once we have construed his meaning, however, we are quite independent of his will. We do not have to accept any longer the values and assumptions he entertained. We can relate his meaning to anything we want and value it as we please. . . . What shall we call that function by which we perceive significance? The obvious choice is "judgment": one understands meaning; one judges significance. . . . In the second, one acts independently—by one's own authority—like a judge.²⁰

According to Brown, Christian authorial-intention theorists would do better to review Hirsch's concept of "implication."²¹ For Hirsch, an implication is a component of meaning of which the author may be unaware.²² Hirsch writes:

To say that a particular meaning is implied by an utterance is not to insist that it is always "unsaid" or "secondary," but only that it is a component within a larger whole. The distinction is between a submeaning of an utterance and the whole

¹⁸ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 497–98.

¹⁹ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 63.

²⁰ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 142–43. The reason for Osborne's, Kaiser's, and probably Thiselton's stated difficulties with Hirsch's concept of significance is their desire to use the term synonymously with "application." Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 498; Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 34. In *Validity in Interpretation*, Hirsch considers application to be a type of implication (see subsequent discussion).

²¹ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 39, 103n10, 118n62.

²² Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 21.

array of submeanings that it carries. This array . . . I call the “meaning” of the utterance, and any submeaning belonging to the array I call an implication.²³

Still, Kaiser and Osborne would struggle to equate Hirsch’s concept of implication with *application*, because they deem application to be distinct from meaning. In the words of Osborne, application is a “secondary act.”²⁴ Brown, Vanhoozer, and Abraham Kuruvilla, however, accept that application is part of meaning, though Brown and Vanhoozer use modifiers to distinguish original from contextualized components of meaning.²⁵ Kuruvilla believes that Hirsch’s concept of meaning is helpful for understanding how preachers can preach with biblical authority. For Kuruvilla, application is a creative, contemporary expression of meaning. “In sum, the move from original textual sense to exemplification is made possible by the transhistorical intention borne by pericopal theology; thereby improvisation is undertaken with fidelity and novelty.”²⁶

Text-Centered Theories

Having looked at authorial-intention theories, this section focuses on the development of text-centered theories from New Criticism to Paul Ricoeur so that preachers can more consciously assess the value of text-centered theories of interpretation for expository preaching. Brown writes that text-centered theories of interpretation are

²³ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 61–62. In a later article, Hirsch prefers “transhistorical intention” over implication, because of his increasing conviction that implications, which include application, are part of meaning, especially for sacred and legal texts. E. D. Hirsch, “Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory,” *New Literary History* 25, no. 3, 552–53.

²⁴ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 498. See also Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 36.

²⁵ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 116–19; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 261–65; Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 49, 174–90.

²⁶ Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 188.

rooted in the idea that texts do not communicate their author's intention completely. Beginning in the decades leading up to World War II with New Criticism, text-centered theories developed from a strong reaction against methods that sought meaning in the author's mind such as that by Dilthey, because they led to hypothetical reconstructions of the sources behind biblical texts. William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley coined the term "intentional fallacy," arguing that the search for authorial intention is misguided, because it "is both inaccessible and undesirable for interpretation."²⁷

In text-centered theories, the text is an autonomous entity. Tremper Longman notes that their "primary tenet . . . may be expressed positively and negatively: the literary work is self-sufficient; the author's intention and background are unimportant. . . . The author does not speak from a position of privilege or special insight into his or her own text."²⁸ Longman explains that New Criticism sought to take a scientific approach to interpretation through a close reading of the text without reference to external sources. In Christian theology, there are two methods of interpretation that are similar to New Criticism. The first is traditional dispensationalism. Charles Ryrie speaks not of authors, but of texts, and argues for a uniform method of interpreting biblical texts, one which uses standard definitions for words and is not genre-dependent. Ryrie argues that one of the pitfalls [in the study of genre] is to claim that "each genre represents truth in its own way and makes unique demands for how it should be read." . . . [Traditional] dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation. This means interpretation that gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage.²⁹

²⁷ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 62–63; John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1984), 167–70.

²⁸ Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie, 1987), 26.

²⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 79–80.

The second is canon-criticism. John Hayes and Carl Holladay write that canon-criticism is an “atemporal or ahistorical” approach to interpretation.³⁰ It posits that the meaning of a biblical text is determined by its function in the canon. Barton writes that in canon-criticism

the words which compose a text [e.g., a biblical book] draw their meaning from the context and setting [i.e., the canon] in which they are meant to be read. A canonical approach depends on the possibility, if we may put it like this, that a text is capable of being *not synonymous with itself* – in other words, that the very same sequence of words can mean different things in different contexts. . . . On such a view there is no such thing as ‘the text itself.’ The meaning of the text [e.g., a biblical book] is a function of the context [i.e., canon] in which it stands, and cannot serve as an independent control of any sort over our reading of it.³¹

As New Criticism died out, structuralism became popular. Structuralism emphasizes the relationship between literary conventions (e.g., genre) and the words they employ. As Noam Chomsky notes, central to interpretation, therefore, is literary competence on the part of the interpreter.³² Robert Alter agrees, but criticizes structuralism for its tendency to inflexibly superimpose standard genre conceptions onto texts that do not strictly adhere to their conventional forms.³³ Ricoeur, however, promotes a less rigid text-centered approach. He believes that neither rigid objectivity nor pure

³⁰ John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 142, 154.

³¹ Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 172 (emphasis his). Barton later adds, “It is quite true that people in New Testament times were very poorly placed to discover what Isaiah actually had said, and tended to read his writings as though they were contemporary; but it is quite mistaken to suggest that this is what they thought they were doing, or that if we do so we shall be returning to their way of looking at the matter. *Neither inclusion in a literary canon, nor inclusion in the biblical canon, actually changes the meaning of a text; what it does is to declare that the text, in its original meaning . . . still has the power to speak now, and always will have.* Of course this may lead people to read the text in ways that actually falsify its meaning; but it is merely muddled to say that its meaning must therefore have changed.” Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 178 (emphasis added).

³² Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 25–35.

³³ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 15.

subjectivity is desirable in interpretation. While not all interpretations are valid, texts contain a “surplus of meaning”—a number of valid interpretations that readers can discover.³⁴

Reader-Response Theories

Having looked at authorial-intention and text-centered theories of interpretation, this section tracks the movement of reader-response theories from their contextually-sensitive beginnings to the freer, reader-controlled theories of today so that preachers can more consciously assess the value of reader-response theories for expository preaching.

Reader-response theories emphasize the role of readers in interpretation. Thiselton notes that in this view, readers are not passive spectators. They are active contributors who complete the meaning of texts by appropriating them.³⁵ Hirsch would not demur, especially with sacred and legal texts, so long as readers ground their contribution in the author’s verbal meaning.³⁶ John Goldingay appreciates the contribution of reader-response theorists when they emphasize the effect that texts were meant to have on their intended recipients. “Given that we are not the originally envisaged audience . . . we are invited to an act of imagination that takes us inside the concerns of that audience.”³⁷

Many reader-response theories, however, seek to free readers from the constraints of texts and authors by integrating Kantian thought and moving beyond it. Vanhoozer

³⁴ Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 148.

³⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Cambridge, England: Eerdmans, 2009), 306.

³⁶ Hirsch, “Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory,” 557–58.

³⁷ John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 36–37.

writes, “Transposed to literary theory, Kant’s Copernican Revolution inverts the traditional picture of interpretation: instead of reading conforming to the text, the text conforms to reading. . . . Unlike Kant, however, the radical reader-response critics deny that all rational readers process the world (or the text) in the same way.”³⁸ Furthermore, such reader-response theories posit that no truth or account of history is valid for all time.³⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that the prejudices of human beings makes objectivity impossible. “The prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments constitute the historical reality of his being.”⁴⁰ The meaning of texts, therefore, is the meaning that readers or their communities give them. Since readers and communities have certain interpretative standards, not all interpretations are valid for a community. Nevertheless, if readers and communities find an interpretation valid according to their standards, then the interpretation is valid.⁴¹

Ideological Theories

To enable preachers to more consciously assess their approach to interpretation, three theories of interpretation have been discussed thus far—authorial-intention, text-centered, and reader-response theories. The final set of theories to be discussed is

³⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 151–52.

³⁹ Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 171. This is a self-defeating argument, because it asserts that it is a universally valid truth that there is no universally valid truth.

⁴⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd English ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 276. For further discussion, see Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 154–68.

⁴¹ Robin Parry, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N.T. Wright, s.v. “Reader-Response Criticism.”

ideological theories of interpretation. This section will review the objectives and roots of ideological theories of interpretation and conclude with Thiselton's critique of them.

Vanhoozer writes that ideological theories of interpretation interpret texts by trying to produce the most liberating interpretation possible for the interpreter's reference group. According to these theories, since all reading is ideological (because it serves someone's interest) interpreters should abandon attempts at objectivity and create ways to use texts to promote liberative justice. Similar to the way psychoanalysts perceive Freudian slips in ordinary conversation, ideological theorists look for ways to find deeper meanings in texts so that they can—consciously and intentionally—import their agenda into texts even when it contradicts the author's agenda.⁴²

Political in nature, ideological theories are rooted in Karl Marx's critique of Ludwig Feuerbach. Feuerbach posits that God is a mental projection of human desires and needs. "*Consciousness of God is human self-consciousness; knowledge of God is human self-knowledge.* By the God you know the human, and conversely, by the human you know the God. The two are one."⁴³ According to Marx, people project a God to meet their needs and desires, because governmental policies produce social inequalities from which people seek to be liberated. "The essence of humanity is not an abstraction which inheres in each individual. . . . Real human nature is a totality of social relations."⁴⁴ Marx argues that it is no longer good enough to describe the problem; action must be taken to resolve it. "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to

⁴² Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 166–67.

⁴³ Ludwig Feuerbach, "Ludwig Feuerbach on the Origins of Religion," in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister E. McGrath, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 574 (emphasis present in source).

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, "Karl Marx on Feuerbach's Views on Religion," in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister E. McGrath, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 576.

change it.”⁴⁵ Thiselton summarizes his critique of ideological theories of interpretation by quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer who writes that “either I determine the place in which I will find God, or I allow God to determine the place where he will be found. If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find then a God who somehow corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature.”⁴⁶

This concludes the discussion of contemporary theories of interpretation. It is my hope that through the preceding review of authorial-intention, text-centered, reader-response, and ideological theories of interpretation, preachers will embrace, in theory and in practice, an approach to interpretation that seeks meaning in authorial intention as found in the author’s verbal expression with sensitivity to the effect the text was designed to have on its original recipients.

Old Testament Narrative Art

This section discusses the contribution of plot, characters, and narrators to Old Testament narrative art. Since most Old Testament narrative critics agree on these issues, this section will highlight their various emphases.

Plot

Mark Allan Powell explains that narrative criticism distinguishes between “story”

⁴⁵ Marx, “Karl Marx on Feuerbach’s Views on Religion,” 576. See also Dilthey, “The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Life-Expressions,” 256.

⁴⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1986) quoted in Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 303.

and “plot.” Story refers to the “events, characters, and setting” of narratives.⁴⁷ Plot refers to a story’s movement from beginning to end. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart point out that individual Old Testament narratives contribute to three plot lines: (1) God’s plan to redeem creation, (2) God’s plan to establish a people for his name, and (3) their own plot line.⁴⁸ Jerome Walsh adds that the characteristic feature of plot is the appearance and resolution of tension, what he calls “arcs of tension.”⁴⁹ C. John Collins writes that these arcs of tension are narrated concisely, primarily through the actions of characters.⁵⁰

Characters

Old Testament narratives are driven by their characters. All agree that main characters are the most important characters in a narrative. Walsh argues, however, that it is not always necessary or possible to identify *the* main character in a narrative.⁵¹ Walsh and Adele Berlin each emphasize an important way to identify an Old Testament narrative’s main characters. Walsh emphasizes counting the number of times that a character’s proper name appears.⁵² Berlin emphasizes the complexity of a character. She

⁴⁷ Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), 23. See also Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 42.

⁴⁸ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 91.

⁴⁹ Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 14.

⁵⁰ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 11.

⁵¹ Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 24–25. This character is often referred to as the protagonist.

⁵² Count only the number of times a character’s proper name appears, even if it is used to refer to someone else. In 2 Sam 11–12, e.g., “Uriah’s wife” counts toward Uriah, not Bathsheba. Furthermore, do not count titles (e.g., king, husband, wife), pronouns (e.g., he, she, him, her, they), or gender references

also notes that lesser characters are important, but are presented more like objects that are necessary for plot development than people.⁵³

According to Kuruvilla, God is always a main character in Old Testament narratives. “God is always present, explicitly or implicitly. He is one character that cannot be eliminated and, therefore, biblical narrative has at the very minimum a two-way interaction of its actants, mankind and God.”⁵⁴ Meir Sternberg builds on this idea when he writes that the longer God is absent from an Old Testament narrative, the more readers should contemplate the reason for God’s absence.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Sternberg adds that God is the one stable character in Old Testament narratives; his stability provides an ironic contrast with the faithless flitting of human characters. As important as God is to Old Testament narratives, Walsh makes it clear that human characters, whether individuals or groups that act in unison, are their most prominent characters.⁵⁶

Dialogue is an important tool for character development. Berlin explains that speech activates readers’ imagination and grabs their interest, often revealing characters’ hearts, minds, and psychological states.⁵⁷ While Alter highlights the use of dialogue to contrast the feelings and values of characters,⁵⁸ Peter Vogt goes a step further arguing

(e.g., woman, man). To see how the frequency of proper names affects the interpretation of Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11–12, see David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 414–15.

⁵³ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, England: Almond, 1983), 23.

⁵⁴ Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 75.

⁵⁵ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 324.

⁵⁶ Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 25.

⁵⁷ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 64.

⁵⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 72–74.

that characters are deemed more reliable when they repeat verbatim the words of someone else, especially the words of God or the narrator.⁵⁹

Narrator

Most Old Testament narrative scholars hold that the narrator is the person telling the story. Jan Fokkelman writes that “the narrator is a pose, an attitude. One could call him an offshoot or a sub-personality of the writer.”⁶⁰ In this way, Shimeon Bar-Efrat suggests, the narrator is to a text what a painter is to a painting.⁶¹ Therefore, Robert Chisholm notes, narrators are usually omniscient, having a God’s eye view of things.⁶² That is not to say that all scholars believe that individual Old Testament narratives contain only one narrative voice. Walsh argues that Old Testament narratives sometimes have multiple (conflicting) narrative voices and that when multiple narrative voices are present within the same *pericope*, the reader needs to discern which narrator is more accurate.⁶³ Philip Satterthwaite, however, writes that the presence of multiple, even conflicting perspectives is the result of narrators allowing characters to speak for themselves. To pick up on the narrator’s perspective, therefore, the reader must pay

⁵⁹ Peter T. Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 57.

⁶⁰ J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 55.

⁶¹ Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Almond, 1989), 1.

⁶² Robert B. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 72–77; Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 102.

⁶³ Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 102.

careful attention to explicit and implicit commentary.⁶⁴ Gordon Wenham writes that explicit commentary refers to obvious narrator comments, whereas implicit commentary is discerned through a careful study of subtle contextual clues.⁶⁵

This concludes the discussion of Old Testament narrative art. After reading the first section, contemporary theories of interpretation, and this section, it is my hope that preachers will study the authorially-intended literary dynamics of Old Testament narratives so that they can reveal or recreate their beauty and power when preaching.

Pericopal Theology of Old Testament Narratives

The remainder of the literature review discusses pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives. It begins with a discussion of the value of formulating pericopal theology as static propositions, moves to a discussion of rhetorical criticism as it relates to pericopal theology, and ends with a discussion of the pericopal theology of 2 Samuel 11–12, the case study text of the thesis-project.

According to Kuruvilla, “a pericope . . . is essentially a self-intact sense unit bearing a relatively complete and integral [theological] idea” that can, context considered, be “inductively derived” from an analysis of the pericope itself.⁶⁶ He adds

⁶⁴ Philip E. Satterthwaite, “Narrative Criticism: The Theological Implications of Narrative Techniques,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 127. For further discussion of “overt” and “covert” narrators, see Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 23–45.

⁶⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 14.

⁶⁶ Abraham Kuruvilla, “Pericopal Theology: An Intermediary Between Text and Application,” *Trinity Journal* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 270.

that the theology of a pericope is its portrayal of “God and the relationship he intends to have with his people. . . . Pericopal theology thus bears potential for the realization of God’s kingdom. . . . God’s people are bidden to make their lives congruent” to it.⁶⁷

Evangelical scholars agree that theology can be derived from pericopes, but debate the value of expressing pericopal theology as static propositions.⁶⁸ Osborne argues that interpreters ought to create a static proposition of a text’s theology before applying the text.⁶⁹ Vanhoozer argues, however, that what matters is not “an abstract principle but . . . concrete theological practice: a *performance* practice, namely, the practice of corresponding in one’s speech and action to the word of God.”⁷⁰ John Sailhamer’s problem is not with static propositions, *per se*, but with the tendency among evangelicals to glean spurious principles from texts, especially Old Testament narratives.⁷¹ For example, Kaiser’s approach to Old Testament narratives, which he equates with that of Haddon Robinson, commonly results in finding principles that other scholars would find spurious. According to Kaiser, biblical *descriptions* in Old Testament narratives can be turned, with few methodological controls, into theological propositions without having to make a special case for it. His approach can be summarized as follows: to “discover the enduring ethical, spiritual, doctrinal, and moral truths or principles which the [biblical]

⁶⁷ Kuruvilla, “Pericopal Theology: An Intermediary Between Text and Application,” 272–73.

⁶⁸ For practical reasons, interpreters have often codified pericopal theology into propositional statements. For more on this subject, see Gary T. Meadors and Stanley N. Gundry, eds., *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

⁶⁹ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 456.

⁷⁰ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 16 (emphasis his). See also John Webster, “The Church as Witnessing Community,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 21–33.

⁷¹ John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 37.

writer himself set forth”⁷² by “stat[ing] the author’s propositions, arguments, *narrations*, and *illustrations* in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church.”⁷³ To many, this is illegitimate. Kuruvilla, who mentions Kaiser by name, disputes Kaiser’s methodology, because it seeks to theologize “what the text is saying” (that is, its words)⁷⁴ without paying serious attention to the rhetorical purpose of the author. Pericopal theology, Kuruvilla argues, “seeks to determine from the text (and its genre) what the author was *doing* with what he was *saying*.⁷⁵ Sidney Greidanus agrees. He writes that approaches like Kaiser’s fail to recognize that in some genres there is a difference between the text’s theme (that is, what the text is saying) and its purpose. While a narrative’s theme contributes to its purpose, application derives from the text’s purpose, not its theme.⁷⁶ In agreement with Kuruvilla’s and Greidanus’ line of thinking, Fee and Stuart have formulated a well-accepted hermeneutical maxim that contradicts Kaiser’s approach to Old Testament narratives: “*Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative (i.e., obligatory) way—unless it*

⁷² Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, 198.

⁷³ Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, 152 (emphasis added). Kaiser recently affirmed this position and equated it with Haddon Robinson’s concept of “the big idea” of a passage in Walter C. Kaiser, “A Principlizing Model,” in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 22; 158.

⁷⁴ See the discussions on pages 29 and 111–12 of the thesis-project.

⁷⁵ Kuruvilla, “Pericopal Theology,” 279n6; 270–71. Explicitly commenting on the principlizing approach of Kaiser, Kuruvilla writes that “invariably, the one seeking to discover [Kaiser-like principles] is searching ‘behind’ the text Therefore, cultural issues—and, apparently, literary genres—‘intrude’ on the text, a distraction from the principle behind the text. . . . The discernment of pericopal theology, on the other hand has its focus ‘in front of’ the text, as the interpreter seeks to determine from the text (and its genre) what the author was *doing* with what he was *saying*.” Kuruvilla, “Pericopal Theology,” 279n6 (emphasis his).

⁷⁶ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 128–30.

can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.”⁷⁷ Despite the problems associated with crafting static propositions of theology, Osborne and Greidanus agree that they are in some sense necessary.⁷⁸ Christopher Wright, reflecting on a debate between four other scholars on the development of theology from biblical texts, notes that all four perspectives agree that biblical texts contain “objective revealed truth that can be grasped and expressed by human minds in the indicative and imperative moods.”⁷⁹ I concur.

The literature review now moves from a discussion of the value of creating static propositions of pericopal theology to the use of rhetorical criticism for the purpose of ascertaining and formulating propositions of pericopal theology from Old Testament narratives. In his 1968 presidential address at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, form critic James Muilenburg encouraged scholars to look not merely at a text’s form, but also its rhetoric.⁸⁰ Patricia Tull notes that for some, rhetorical criticism stops at a study of a pericope’s stylistics and for others it includes an analysis of its purpose.⁸¹ Powell’s definition incorporates both stylistics and purpose when he writes

⁷⁷ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 118–19 (emphasis theirs). See also Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 424–26.

⁷⁸ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 456; Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 128–30, 136–40.

⁷⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, “A Reflection by Christopher J. H. Wright,” in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 320–21.

⁸⁰ James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 1 (March 1969): 8–9.

⁸¹ Patricia K. Tull, “Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, ed. Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 157. See also Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” 8–10.

that rhetorical criticism is “a pragmatic approach to literature that focuses on the means through which a work achieves a particular effect on its reader. [It is] interested, for example, not only in the point that a work wishes to make but also the basis on which that point is established.”⁸²

The remainder of this section discusses the contribution of (1) pericope identification, (2) theological context, (3) historical context of the Old Covenant and original audience, and (4) literary context to the theology of Old Testament narrative pericopes.

Pericope Identification

Defining “pericope” for the purpose of selecting a proper preaching portion is difficult. Between 1968 and 1970, a debate arose within scholarship over proper text selection for the study of Old Testament narratives. It began when Manahem Perry and Sternberg wrote an article on 2 Samuel 11 and referred to it as a self-contained unit. Frustrated with this designation, Boaz Arpali and Uriel Simon replied that 2 Samuel 11 needs 2 Samuel 12 to be a self-contained unit. In their rejoinder, Perry and Sternberg argued that any literary unit, large or small, when understood in light of its surrounding context is a legitimate object of inquiry. Yaira Amit concludes that Perry and Sternberg are correct.⁸³ Timothy Ralston argues, however, that academic research and preaching are

⁸² Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 14. See also Collins, *Genesis 1–4, 6–9*; Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 157–63; Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 202. For an advanced discussion, see Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 36–88.

⁸³ Yaira Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 12–21.

different.⁸⁴ Sermons require application and, since, as Greidanus notes, deriving theological principles from narratives generally requires an examination of pericopes, it follows that expositions of Old Testament narratives will generally require the preaching of pericopes.⁸⁵

Discerning where complete narrative units begin and end is not easy. Bar-Efrat warns against overconfidence when he writes that “since themes or ideas are not stated overtly, but have to be extracted by means of interpretation, one should exercise a good deal of self-restraint and self-criticism before proceeding to the delineation of thematic or ideational structures.”⁸⁶ David Dorsey agrees. He writes that biblical narratives have three ways of indicating where complete narrative units begin and end. The greater the number of indicators, the more credible is the identification. The first way is a complete plot.⁸⁷ In figure 3.1, Longman illustrates the standard components of a simple plot:

⁸⁴ Timothy J. Ralston, “Showing the Relevance: Application, Ethics, and Preaching” in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 306.

⁸⁵ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 27–30; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 38–39. See also Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 221–22.

⁸⁶ Shimeon Bar-Efrat, “Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative,” *Vetus Testamentum* 30, no. 2 (April 1980): 169. See also Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” 9.

⁸⁷ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 21.

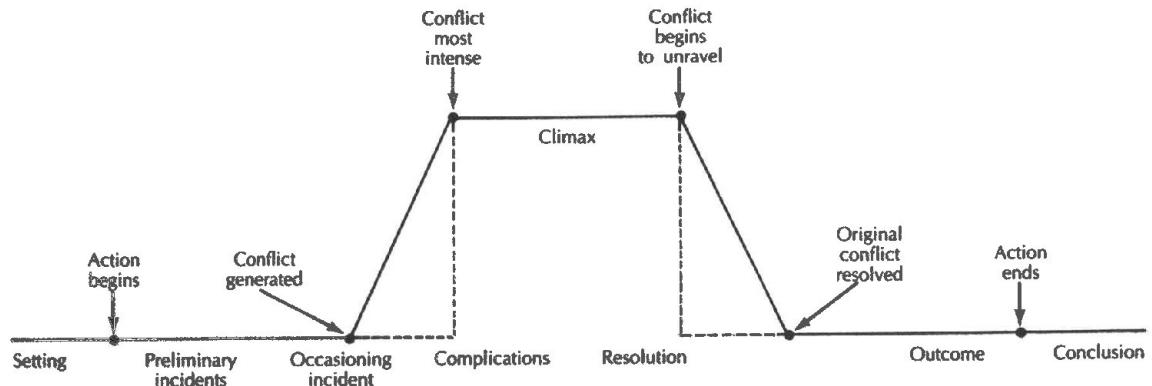


Figure 1. Standard Structure of an Old Testament Narrative Pericope.
Source: Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 92.

Stuart notes that many passages do not strictly follow a standard form. “The differences between your passage and all others of the same essential form are what make your passage unique and give it its special function in the Bible.”⁸⁸ Greidanus illustrates this in figure 2 with the plot of Genesis 2:4–3:26. He notes that this plot is a complex one and that despite its “several subplots (complications), it has one overall plot.”⁸⁹

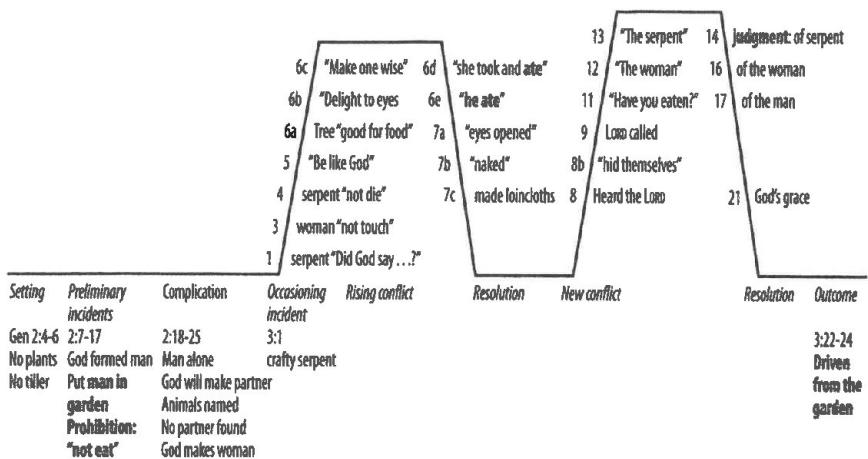


Figure 2. Complex Plot of Gen 2:4–3:24.

Source: Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 65.

⁸⁸ Douglas K. Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 4th ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 14.

⁸⁹ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From Genesis*, 65.

Dorsey, who like Bar-Efrat is suspicious of interpreters' subjective sense of where a plot begins and ends, encourages interpreters to place greater weight on the other two ways that biblical narratives indicate where narrative units begin and end, namely, objective beginning and end markers. Beginning markers include formal introductions that introduce new characters or indicate changes in time and location. End markers are often statements or summaries that wrap up the events that came before it.⁹⁰

Theological Context

Having completed the discussion of the contribution of pericope identification to Old Testament narrative pericopal theology, a second contributor, theological context, will now be reviewed. Richard Briggs writes that the Bible needs to be read within its theological, including covenantal, context.⁹¹ In crafting static propositions of Old Testament narrative pericopal theology, I recommend the use of Robinson's "big idea" subject and complement questions. Prominent evangelical scholars infer that the theological context of Old Testament narratives requires "the LORD" or "God" to be the grammatical subject of Robinson's subject question, "What is [this text] talking about?"⁹² Fuller responses to Robinson's subject question would include something about "the LORD's" or "God's" nature or covenant-keeping. Gordon McConville and Satterthwaite

⁹⁰ Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 23. See also Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," 169–70.

⁹¹ Richard Briggs, *Reading the Bible Wisely* (London: SPCK, 2003), 5.

⁹² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 41. While Robinson and I differ in how we answer this question and his complement question for Old Testament narratives—he has been supportive of the "universalizing the plot line" approach (see pages 2–7, particularly 3n13, and 113–15, 117–18 of the thesis-project)—it is fair to use Robinson's questions, because we both believe that our conclusions represent the text's theological message. See also Kuruvilla's refinement of this question on page 53 of the thesis-project.

explain that Old Testament narratives are designed to reveal God, his character, and covenant purposes with the goal of provoking covenant obedience.⁹³ Andrew Hill and John Walton agree. They recommend that people “think of [Old Testament narratives] as theological rather than historical. Remember that the main focus of the literature is on God and his covenant, not people or events.”⁹⁴ They add that

the purpose of the historical literature of the Bible is to show the ways in which the Lord has acted in history to fulfill his covenant promises and to carry out his agenda. One could call it didactic (giving instruction) in the sense that it is revelation of who God is by recording what he has done. . . . Israel’s God is revealed as One who has a plan for history and who intervenes to ensure that the plan is executed. . . . The Old Testament historical literature needs to be understood within the frame of reference that it is a strategic part of God’s self-revelation. . . . As we noted earlier, a modern tendency is to regard the message of the historical literature as being the role models offered by the persons who cross its pages. In contrast, as God’s self-revelation, its intention is to convey instruction about and knowledge of God. . . . Some readers are inclined to look for new insights and lessons in each account. But rather [look for] patterns, themes, and motifs that we ought to see as weaving the historical tapestry into a picture of the sovereign God of the covenant. The significance of each thread is the contribution it makes to the tapestry. . . . The narratives must be approached through their context, and God must be seen as the focus.⁹⁵

Vogt expresses this same idea by downplaying the centrality of human beings in the pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives. He writes that biblical

authors were less interested in conveying details about the lives of even the biblical ‘heroes’ than in communicating something about God and his interactions with his people. In Genesis 39, the emphasis is not on Joseph per se but on *God’s faithfulness in being with Joseph*, in helping him to prosper, in preserving and protecting him, and in placing Joseph where he wanted him *in order to accomplish his purposes in the lives of the descendants of Abraham*.⁹⁶

⁹³ J. Gordon McConville and Philip E. Satterthwaite, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 21.

⁹⁴ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 211.

⁹⁵ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 211.

⁹⁶ Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, 51 (emphasis added).

Amit, a Jewish scholar, agrees that God, his nature and covenant-keeping, are central to the pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives:

It seems reasonable to assume that the authors of biblical narratives believed that if they told their flock about God's mighty deeds—how God saved the people in times of distress, how their fate was in God's hands, and how it paid to obey God—then the community of worshipers would keep its side of the covenant and remain faithful to God.”⁹⁷

Historical Context

Having reviewed the contribution of pericope identification and theological context to the pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives, attention turns to historical context. Old Testament narratives reveal God's timeless character within an Old Covenant context. Harry Buis indicates that the covenantal context of Old Testament narratives requires an understanding of the retribution principle. The retribution principle teaches that those who bless God will be blessed, and those who do not will be cursed. Originally found in Genesis 12:1–3, it is expressed in different ways throughout the Old Testament. It is the reason why Israel's military victories were God's blessing, a result of Israel's or Israel's king's obedience.⁹⁸ Furthermore, J. Barton Payne adds that any study of the Old Testament requires an understanding of the Old Covenant and its expansion over time. After its most succinct expression in Genesis 12:1–3, the Old Covenant expands to include stipulations pertaining to the land (Genesis 15), circumcision (Genesis

⁹⁷ Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 2.

⁹⁸ Harry Buis, *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Moisés Silva and Merrill C. Tenney, rev. ed., s.v. “Retribution.” See also John H. Walton, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, s.v. “Retribution.”

17), the Torah (Deuteronomy), and the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:8–16).⁹⁹

The historical context of Old Testament narratives also includes the original audience. Sailhamer notes that biblical narratives were not written for those in them, but for a later audience.¹⁰⁰ Osborne expounds on the importance of the original audience by saying that “the group to which a work is *addressed* plays a major role in the meaning of a passage.”¹⁰¹ Goldingay agrees, but warns against trying to pinpoint the exact original audience of Old Testament narratives, because their composition dates are uncertain and they were likely subject to subsequent editing.¹⁰² Greidanus, commenting on later editorial changes in Genesis, writes that these additions did not change the message of these narratives; they clarified it for later audiences.¹⁰³ Greidanus also argues that whether written to Israel before, during, or after its control of the Promised Land, Old Testament narratives taught about God—his nature or covenant-keeping—to meet Israel’s need to exclusively trust in the one true God.¹⁰⁴ To revive Amit’s quote from earlier:

⁹⁹ J. Barton Payne, *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Moisés Silva and Merrill C. Tenney, rev. ed., s.v. “Covenant (OT).”

¹⁰⁰ John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009), 25–27.

¹⁰¹ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 38 (emphasis his). Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 10–11.

¹⁰² Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture*, 33–35.

¹⁰³ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From Genesis*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From Genesis*, 34–38. Note that ancient Israel was not in need of another set of primary texts for ethical instruction. The Old Testament law existed. This does not mean that theological ethics are not taught in Old Testament narratives, only that they are tertiary and require careful analysis to discern. For a helpful study on the discernment of authorially-intended ethics in Old Testament narratives, see Wenham, *Story as Torah*. For a brief, fascinating study of the reasons why Israel was so tempted to place their trust in other gods in addition to Yahweh, see Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 450–54.

It seems reasonable to assume that the authors of biblical narratives believed that if they told their flock about God's mighty deeds—how God saved the people in times of distress, how their fate was in God's hands, and how it paid to obey God—then the community of worshipers would keep its side of the covenant and remain faithful to God.¹⁰⁵

Literary Context

So far this topic has discussed the contribution of (1) pericope identification, (2) theological context, and (3) historical context to the pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives. The fourth, literary context, will now be discussed. The rhetorical features of an Old Testament narrative's literary context provide much of the answer to Robinson's complement question, "What is [the text] saying about [its subject]?"¹⁰⁶ Amit supports Robinson's concern for the message of the text when she writes, "We may even ask, what is the purpose of analysis? Is it sufficient to discover the literary techniques used by the author so that we may admire them? Or perhaps its function is to discover how the literary techniques contribute to the building of the story significance?"¹⁰⁷

There are four features of an Old Testament narrative's literary context that point or contribute to the answer to Robinson's complement question.¹⁰⁸ They overlap with each other, but can be discussed individually. First, Amit suggests that those scenes on which the narrative dwells are the most important to its message. There are two ways to determine which scenes a narrative dwells on. The first way is to determine which scenes

¹⁰⁵ Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 43. See also Kuruvilla's refinement of this question on page 53 of the thesis-project.

¹⁰⁷ Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 127.

¹⁰⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 88; Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 114; Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 83; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 141–43.

take up the largest percentage of the narrative; the larger the percentage, the more important the scene. Amit writes that “as a rule, the reader should look closely at what scene in the story is the longest, which one enjoys a relatively long time of narration.”¹⁰⁹ According to Walsh, the second way to recognize those scenes on which the narrative dwells is by analyzing the ratio of narrated time to real time. Narrated time refers to the number of words used to narrate a scene. Real time refers to the amount of time it took for the events in a scene to occur in real life. The more words per unit of time, the more important the scene.¹¹⁰ Bar-Efrat explains Amit’s and Walsh’s insights this way:

As mentioned in the foregoing, the narrative has a twofold link with time, with objective time outside it (narration time) and with literary time inside it (narrated time). . . . By studying the relation between narration time and narrated time the relative weight of the various sections of the narrative will be clarified, as will their proportions with regard to one another and the narrative as a whole, thereby disclosing the focal points of the narrative. By elucidating the relationship between the two time systems we will be able to . . . draw conclusions about the meaning of the narrative, its central theme, etc.¹¹¹

The second literary feature that points or contributes to the answer to Robinson’s complement question for Old Testament narratives is quoted speech. Osborne writes that “dialogue often carries much of the [narrative’s] emphasis in characterization and theology.”¹¹² Vogt agrees, noting that “dialogue is frequently used to introduce or highlight the main point(s) of [an Old Testament narrative] passage.”¹¹³ Alter and Walsh agree with Osborne and Vogt and state that dialogue is so prominent in many Old

¹⁰⁹ Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 108.

¹¹⁰ Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 55.

¹¹¹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 143.

¹¹² Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 208.

¹¹³ Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, 56.

Testament narratives that scenes of narration are often merely a bridge to scenes of quoted speech.¹¹⁴ According to Bar-Efrat, Amit, and Walsh, that a scene with a preponderance of dialogue is central [to a narrative] is seen by the fact that they are often the largest scenes in the narrative and have the highest ratios of narrated time to real time.¹¹⁵

The fourth literary feature that points or contributes to Robinson's complement question is God's intervention. Bruce Waltke writes, "The narrative theologian pays attention to the mode in which God intervenes: in theophany, visions, or providence."¹¹⁶ Waltke adds that God's intervention can come directly from God or through visions, dreams, prophets, or reliable human characters.¹¹⁷ Chisholm supplements Waltke's emphasis on God's intervention by saying that evaluative comments by narrators are another way of revealing God's perspective on the events in a narrative.¹¹⁸

The fourth literary feature that points or contributes to Robinson's complement question for Old Testament narratives is repetition. Alter writes that the use of repetition in biblical narrative is intentional and can indicate ideological intent.¹¹⁹ Walsh says that the most authoritative repetitions occur when a reliable character, the narrator, or God

¹¹⁴ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 65, 75; Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 56.

¹¹⁵ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 147–48, 280; Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 109; Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 55–56.

¹¹⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 107.

¹¹⁷ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 107.

¹¹⁸ Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 72–73.

¹¹⁹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 88, 92–93, 95–96.

repeat each other verbatim.¹²⁰ Alter and Satterthwaite suggest that looking only to repeated words or phrases would be a mistake. Interpreters must look also to type-scenes (i.e., narratives with similar content or plot structure).¹²¹

Pericopal Theology of 2 Samuel 11–12

So far in this review of pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives, the discussion has centered on the value of static propositions and rhetorical criticism for Old Testament narrative pericopal theology. What follows is a review of the pericopal theology of 2 Samuel 11–12. A. A. Anderson and other interpreters hold that while 2 Samuel 11 is a self-contained unit, it is not a pericope.¹²² Anderson writes, “From the literary point of view vv 1–27a [of 2 Samuel 11] are fairly self-contained and form a single narrative unit but theologically they require chap 12 for their completion because the story ends with an unrepentant David and without any divine judgment or critique on his behavior.”¹²³ Looking at objective beginning and end markers, Anthony Campbell indicates that 2 Samuel 11:1 is a clear beginning marker with its change of time and place and 2 Samuel 12:31 is a clear end marker in the form of a concluding summary.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 82–89.

¹²¹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 96; Satterthwaite, “Narrative Criticism: The Theological Implications of Narrative Techniques,” 122–26.

¹²² A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 152. See also J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses*, vol. 1 (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1993), 71.

¹²³ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 152.

¹²⁴ Anthony Campbell, *2 Samuel*, Forms of Old Testament Literature (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 101, 111–13, 120. See also Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 152, 168; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, 50.

In terms of historical context, Ronald Youngblood notes that the latest Old Covenant expansion occurs at 2 Samuel 7:8–17 with the Davidic Covenant.¹²⁵ David Firth points out that the birth of Solomon in 2 Samuel 12:24 fulfills part of the Davidic Covenant. In 2 Samuel 7:12, God promises to give David a “seed”—not from among his previous six sons, but one yet to be born.¹²⁶ Longman notes that the original audience of 1–2 Samuel knew that their fate was intertwined with the actions of their king. The problem was that kings are often disobedient to God, the ultimate source of their security. If a king’s perfect obedience is a prerequisite for security in the Promised Land, then their fate is all but certain.¹²⁷

In terms of literary context, Firth indicates that 2 Samuel 11:1–5 is brief, with little dialogue. The narrative dwells heavily on David and Uriah’s interactions in 11:6–17 as well as Uriah’s death in 11:14–25. This is highlighted by the frequent use of quoted speech and the ratio of narrated time to real time. The center of the story, theologically, is 12:1–15a, particularly 12:7–14. It is nearly all dialogue in the form of God’s intervention via Nathan. In 12:13–14, through David’s repentance it is shown that God will continue to work with sinful kings of Israel, but discipline must still occur. In 12:15b–23, God’s first step of discipline is narrated. The events of 12:24–25 are brief, but theologically significant, because God demonstrates through the birth of Solomon that he will not only work with repentant kings of Israel, he will continue to use them to fulfill the Davidic

¹²⁵ Ronald F. Youngblood, “2 Samuel,” in *1 Samuel–2 Kings*, rev. ed., vol. 3, Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 380.

¹²⁶ Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 385; Youngblood, “2 Samuel,” 387; Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 122; R. P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 239. See also 2 Sam 3:2–5.

¹²⁷ Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 164.

Covenant. The narrative ends in 12:26–31 with God’s intervention granting military victory to Israel over the Ammonites.¹²⁸

In terms of static propositions of the pericopal theology of 2 Samuel 11–12, Waltke writes that the narrative “teaches several lessons: (1) self-indulgence in war is dangerous; (2) political victory is more enjoyable when combined with personal victory; (3) settling accounts with an enemy’s crimes can wait, but setting accounts with crimes against God cannot wait.”¹²⁹ Robinson’s conclusion, which is appropriated by Steven Mathewson, is, “When believers fail to walk with God, they put their lives, families, and careers in jeopardy.”¹³⁰ Kuruvilla discerns four principles from this passage:

[1] Faithful allegiance to God, the true sovereign, is a priority to which believers are called to be aligned, manifest in the reined exercise of power. . . . [2] faithfulness to Yahweh is manifested in the restriction of one’s self-indulgent passions. . . . [3] faithfulness to God involves recognizing evil for what it is in God’s eyes. . . . [4] unfaithfulness to God, manifest in the disrespecting of his word and the public dishonoring of his name, will often get its just deserts.¹³¹

Firth understands the passage as answering the question of why God can use a sinful king like David, but not Saul, to fulfill his covenantal purposes. The answer is found in David’s genuine repentance, in contrast to Saul’s response and as demonstrated by God

¹²⁸ Firth, *I & 2 Samuel*, 385, 412–31.

¹²⁹ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 665. I find none of these, the way they are worded, to be taught in 2 Sam 11–12. Waltke is a careful narrative theologian, so it makes me wonder what he means by “teach.”

¹³⁰ Haddon Robinson, quoted in Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 106. Even if true in some sense, I doubt that 2 Sam 11–12 teaches this idea.

¹³¹ Kuruvilla, “Pericopal Theology,” 276–78. I agree that 1, 2, and 4 are taught in the passage. I am not as confident about 3. Kuruvilla believes it is taught in the passage, because David told Joab in 2 Sam 11:25 not to see Joab’s participation in the murder of Uriah as evil and the narrator informs the reader two verses later that God saw David’s murderous actions as evil. The validity of this principle depends upon the assumption that David believed his actions to be acceptable. I am not convinced that was the case, but Kuruvilla may be correct. In this regard, all that can be asked of preachers is that they get and make use of the biblical training that is available to them and to study the text to the best of their ability. In the end, we will not all agree on everything.

fulfilling part of the Davidic Covenant in the birth of Solomon. He also highlights God's discipline in the midst of his grace.¹³² Anderson, Bill Arnold, and Joyce Baldwin understand the pericope similarly.¹³³ Firth and Anderson, however, do not attempt to contextualize the message. Arnold does, but in doing so he ventures away from application, preferring instead to pontificate on sex, sin, and forgiveness in Western societies.¹³⁴ Baldwin, however, contextualizes part of the message when she writes that the birth of Solomon expresses the reality that God accepts repentant sinners.¹³⁵

This concludes the review of pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives. Through this section, I hope that people will come to realize that the pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives centers on God—his nature and covenant-keeping.

This chapter presented a literature review of (1) contemporary theories of interpretation, (2) Old Testament narrative art, and (3) pericopal theology of Old Testament narratives. The next chapter describes the project design of the thesis-project. The project incorporated many of the concepts in the thesis-project's first three chapters into a reference tool and performed a pre-test and post-test survey to discover if the reference tool immediately enhanced the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages of Old Testament narratives.

¹³² Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 385, 430–31. Following Firth's lead, see table 2.2 for the exegetical- and pericopal-theological messages that I formulated for 2 Sam 11–12. See also the last page of Appendix C.

¹³³ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 165–66; Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 540; Joyce Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 1980), 257–61.

¹³⁴ Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 544–53.

¹³⁵ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 259–60.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

This chapter describes the project that was designed to address the problem of the failure of many *evangelical*¹ preachers to deliver *expository messages* of Old Testament narratives. The chapter describes the (1) purpose, (2) setting, (3) implementation, and (4) measurement design of the project.

Purpose of the Project

The project was designed to immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical preachers to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. The only means used was the reading of a user-friendly reference tool. The project's research question was: "Will the reference tool immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives?" I sought to determine if simply reading a user-friendly reference tool with three chapters—one that explains what it takes to preach with biblical authority, one that provides a step-by-step methodology for moving from Old Testament narrative text to *Take-Home Truth*, and one that gives a commentary for 2 Samuel 11–12 which exemplifies the approach of the middle chapter—would quickly overcome years of training in or use of poor Old Testament narrative hermeneutics.

My thesis is that the reference tool will immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. To test

¹ Terms that are defined in the Glossary of the thesis-project (see page vii) are italicized the first time they appear in the body of a chapter.

this thesis I created a survey for current evangelical pastors and exposed them to the reference tool using 2 Samuel 11–12 as a test case. Participants' ability to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives was determined to be enhanced when they provided evidence that they were persuaded by the reference tool's approach and demonstrated greater hermeneutical accuracy after reading the reference tool. This was accomplished by having participants answer (1) similar pre-reading and post-reading questions on the interpretation and *application* of 2 Samuel 11–12 and (2) a post-reading question on the likelihood of them using the reference tool's approach to Old Testament narratives in the future. The thesis would be proven true if a majority of the participants indicated that they were persuaded by the reference tool's approach and provided evidence of greater hermeneutical accuracy in their post-reading questions.

Setting of the Project

The survey was conducted online using the survey creation tool at <http://www.surveygizmo.com>. This format allowed respondents to participate in the survey at a time and place of their choosing between August 2 and 15, 2011. Prior to starting the survey, participants were told that the survey (1) is for a doctoral program, (2) is designed to get feedback on a reference tool that was created to help pastors preach Old Testament narratives, (3) needed to be completed in one sitting, (4) would take approximately ninety minutes to complete, and (5) responses would be anonymous. Furthermore, participants were told that while their honest feedback was needed, there were no right or wrong answers.

Implementation of the Project

This section discusses the project's three-step implementation process. These steps consisted of (1) creating a user-friendly reference tool for the purpose of enabling evangelical preachers to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives, (2) creating a pre-test and post-test survey using the online survey creation tool at <http://www.surveygizmo.com>, and (3) implementing the survey.

Creation of Reference Tool

Though I did not know it at the time, the research that went into the creation of the user-friendly reference tool began while taking a Spring, 2001 seminary course in hermeneutics. The course exposed me to common errors in the interpretation and application of Old Testament narratives. Unsatisfied with only knowing how *not* to interpret and apply Old Testament narratives, but unaware of how *to* do it, I began to research the topic as part of an ongoing project to create and revise a six-to-eight week hermeneutics course that I taught at the local church level.

My research into Old Testament narrative hermeneutics intensified in June 2010, shortly after I decided to address the problem of the failure of most evangelical preachers to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives in my Doctor of Ministry thesis-project. From June 1 to November 1, 2010 I spent approximately 750 hours researching for and writing the initial draft of the reference tool. I had four guidelines in creating it. First, it needed to provide a rationale for why preachers should reassess their ability to preach with biblical authority from Old Testament narratives. The reference tool's influence would be limited if preachers were not convinced that they should be

open to improving their hermeneutical skills. Second, it needed to enable preachers to discern *theological messages* from Old Testament narratives. Third, the skills taught in the reference tool needed to be practical. Skills that preachers cannot or will not use during sermon preparation were left out of the reference tool, because there is no need to burden preachers with impractical idealism. Fourth, the reference tool needed to be able to be read within forty-five minutes so that most respondents could finish the survey within ninety minutes. I saw the need for brevity, because the participants were willing to give only a short amount of time to the survey's completion. I determined, therefore, to cap the reference tool at 8,500 words.²

Creation of Survey

In November 2010, a prototype of the thesis-project's survey was created to test the initial draft of the reference tool. Insights learned from this experience lead to the creation of the survey's final version in August 2011 using the online survey creation tool at <http://www.surveygizmo.com>. The survey's final version employed five techniques that increased its effectiveness. The first technique was "skip logic." Skip logic streamlines the survey taking process by skipping survey pages with questions that are irrelevant to a particular participant. For example, respondents that indicated that they had not completed any master's level coursework unknowingly skipped several questions pertaining to graduate school. The second technique was "hide logic." Hide logic allows questions to appear on the same page as the previous question, but only after the previous question has been answered. For example, on the page that asked respondents how likely

² After the thesis-project's survey was complete, the reference tool was revised. The current version, found in Appendix C (page 109), is over 19,000 words.

they were to closely follow the reference tool's approach in the future, three questions were hidden. Depending on a respondent's answer, one of the three questions appeared on the page. The third technique was "answer randomization." Answer randomization keeps survey creators from accidentally making choice "A," for example, the correct answer in multiple-choice questions too often. Whenever answers were randomized, I informed respondents with the statement, "Answers appear in computer generated random order." This helped respondents realize that it is futile to try to correctly guess which choice—A, B, C, D, E—is the best one based on their assessment of previous answers. The fourth technique was "hidden time-stamping." Hidden time-stamping allows those who review survey results to see how long it took respondents to move from one page of questions to another page without respondents knowing.³ While used throughout the survey, its primary purpose was to see how long respondents took to "read" the reference tool. It was hoped that a relationship could be established between the participants' post-reading responses and the amount of time they took to "read" the survey.⁴ The fifth technique was "piped-in answers." Piped-in answers allow respondents to select or evaluate answers they gave to earlier open-ended questions. This keeps respondents from being compelled to select only answers that were provided by the survey.

³ According to a survey design technician for <http://www.surveygizmo.com>, survey creators need to be very careful about appearing to exert control over respondents, because respondents will rebel, leading to incomplete surveys or intentionally false answers.

⁴ No relationship could be established.

Table 4.1. Use of Piped-In Answers

Question	Possible Answers ^a
What is the primary principle or message that 2 Sam 11–12 teaches believers today? (one sentence)	[Open-ended] ^b
Of the following options, which sentence best represents the primary principle or message that 2 Sam 11–12 teaches believers today?	<p>A. Adultery is a dangerous sin that has devastating consequences.</p> <p>B. When we fail to walk with God, we put our life, family, and career in jeopardy.</p> <p>C. The characteristics of a troubled leader are idleness, willful disobedience, covering up, and hypocrisy.</p> <p>D. Text of the above open-ended question was piped-in.</p>
If you had to choose one, which of the following principles or messages would you preach from 2 Sam 11–12?	<p>A. Adultery is a dangerous sin that has devastating consequences.</p> <p>B. When we fail to walk with God, we put our life, family, and career in jeopardy.</p> <p>C. The characteristics of a troubled leader are idleness, willful disobedience, covering up, and hypocrisy.</p> <p>D. Text of the above open-ended question was piped-in.</p>

^a The answers to the multiple choice questions appeared in computer generated random order.

^b Post-reading, respondents were informed of their pre-reading answer to this question.

Implementation of Survey

On August 2, 2011, the survey was posted online. Three friends did the work of recruiting participants. They did not participate in the survey, because they were already familiar with the reference tool. They went beyond the call of duty to persuade thirteen pastors to participate in the survey before it closed on August 15, 2011.

Measurement Design of the Project

The survey's results were measured using a pre-test and post-test methodology. The purpose of the measurement was to determine the answer to the research question and test the thesis according to the testing criteria found in table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Research Question, Thesis, and Criteria

Research Question	Will the reference tool immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives?
Thesis	My thesis is that the reference tool will immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives.
Criterion 1	Persuades respondents of reference tool's approach.
Criterion 2	Post-reading responses provide evidence of greater hermeneutical accuracy.

To test the first criterion, the question in table 4.3 was devised. Using hide logic, once the question was answered, respondents were given an opportunity to explain their selection.

Table 4.3. Question for Assessing Criterion 1

Question	Very Likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool when preparing sermons on OT narratives?					

To test the second criterion, four pre-reading questions appeared after the reference tool was read to give respondents the opportunity to provide evidence of greater hermeneutical accuracy. The post-reading versions of these questions appear in table 4.4. For respondents to demonstrate greater hermeneutical accuracy, they needed to have demonstrated it in their post-reading answers to these four questions, though accurate pre-reading answers that were retained qualified as well.

Table 4.4. Post-Reading Version of the Four Questions Used for Assessing Criterion 2

Question ^a	Possible Answers ^a
How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Sam 11–12? (more than one answer is allowed)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10+
What is the primary principle or message that 2 Sam 11–12 teaches believers today? (one sentence)	[Open-Ended] ^b
If you had to choose one, which of the following principles or messages would you preach from 2 Sam 11–12?	<p>A. Adultery is a dangerous sin that has devastating consequences.</p> <p>B. When we fail to walk with God, we put our life, family, and career in jeopardy.</p> <p>C. The characteristics of a troubled leader are idleness, willful disobedience, covering up, and hypocrisy.</p> <p>D. [Text of the above open-ended question was piped-in.]</p>
Below is your response to the pre-reading question, “In a sermon what might you say to apply 2 Sam 11–12 to life? Post-reading, how would you classify these statements (e.g. application, misapplication, . . . For [non-application] what place, if any, do they have in the sermon. ^d	[Open-ended. Text of pre-reading counterpart was piped-in.]

^a Questions 1–3 begin with “Having assessed the value of the Reference Tool for your own preaching—.”

^b The answers to the multiple choice questions appeared in computer generated random order.

^c Post-reading, respondents were informed of their pre-reading answer to this question.

^d There was no way to require respondents to comply.

This chapter has described the project that was designed to address the problem of the failure of many evangelical preachers to deliver expository messages of Old Testament narratives. The chapter described the (1) purpose, (2) setting, (3) implementation, and (4) measurement design of the project. The next chapter describes the outcomes of the project. The project's degree of success, the lessons learned, its effect on my future ministry, my recommendations, and a future research need will be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES

This chapter discusses the outcomes of the thesis-project. The outcomes to be discussed are (1) the thesis testing results, (2) the lessons learned from the thesis-project, (3) the impact of the thesis-project on my future ministry, (4) recommendations, and (5) the identification of an area that needs further research.

Thesis Testing Results

The thesis-project addressed the problem of many *evangelical*¹ preachers' failure to deliver *expository messages* from Old Testament narratives. To address the problem I created a user-friendly reference tool and assessed its immediate effectiveness via a survey of thirteen evangelical pastors. Table 5.1 displays the research question, my thesis concerning it, and the two criteria for testing the thesis. If seven participants met both criteria, the thesis would be proven true.

Table 5.1. Research Question, Thesis, and Criteria

Research Question	Will the reference tool immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives?
Thesis	My thesis is that the reference tool will immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives.
Criterion 1	Persuades respondents of reference tool's approach.
Criterion 2	Post-reading responses provide evidence of greater hermeneutical accuracy.

As table 5.2 indicates, the participants were overwhelmingly persuaded. Eleven out of thirteen indicated that they were "Very Likely" or "Likely" to follow the reference tool's approach in the future. Eight of them either gave no indication that they would

¹ Terms that are defined in the Glossary of the thesis-project (see page vii) are italicized the first time they appear in the body of a chapter.

depart from the reference tool's approach or stated that they would do so only when they faced time constraints.

Table 5.2. Evidence That a Majority of Pastors Were Persuaded by Reference Tool's Approach

Question	Very Likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool when preparing sermons on OT narratives?	3	8	1	1	0

Since two respondents were not persuaded, seven out of the eleven that were persuaded needed to provide evidence of greater hermeneutical accuracy for the thesis to be proven true. As table 5.3 indicates, four post-reading questions provided respondents with the opportunity to demonstrate greater hermeneutical accuracy. According to table 5.3, ten of the eleven persuaded respondents demonstrated greater hermeneutical accuracy. Six of them (3, 22, 25, 26, 27, and 31) demonstrated marked improvement.

Table 5.3. Post-Reading Opportunities to Demonstrate Greater Hermeneutical Accuracy

Response ID	Post-Reading, Might Preach 2 Sam 11-12 in One Sermon	Post-Reading, (More) Accurate Free Response Primary Principle	Post-Reading, ^a (More) Accurate Multiple Choice What Would You Preach?	Post-Reading, Indicated One or More Pre-Reading "Applications" Inaccurate
3	X ^a	X	X	N/A ^e
17				X
18	X			N/A
19	X ^b			
22	X	X	X	N/A
24 ^c				N/A
25	X	X	X	
26	X	X	X	X
27 ^d		X	X	N/A
31	X	X	X	X
32				X

^a Respondent indicates he would preach 2 sermons, but the first would be a preview.

^b Respondent indicates he could opt to preach multiple sermons, showing how they contribute to the whole.

^c Respondent stuck with pre-reading answers which were not accurate.

^d Respondent stuck with pre-reading answers which were essentially accurate.

^e There was no way to require respondents to indicate whether their pre-reading "applications" were legitimate.

Since ten out of thirteen respondents were persuaded by the reference tool's approach and able to provide evidence of greater hermeneutical accuracy, my thesis that the reference tool will immediately enhance the ability of most evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives was proven true.

Lessons Learned

This section discusses five lessons that I learned as a result of the thesis-project. Since these lessons are rooted in certain personal convictions, I will briefly share my foundational views on homiletics and hermeneutics and relate them to the freedom that hermeneutists and homilists have so that readers can understand the basis on which these lessons are grounded.

My hermeneutical and homiletical views arise from the deeply held conviction that God and his will are unknowable apart from revelation, especially as found in Jesus Christ and Scripture. In my view, nearly any claim about God or his will that is not taught in Scripture is speculation at best. I value premodernism's appreciation of tradition, the Enlightenment's concern for objectivity, and postmodernism's recognition of self-deception and bias in the interpretive process. I believe, therefore, that preachers have a responsibility to make a serious attempt to grow in self-awareness, abandoning self-protection and self-projection mechanisms when interpreting Scripture, so that they can listen to the God who speaks in Scripture.² This is not Enlightenment idealism for I do not hold out hope that this will happen *en masse* or that if it did that it would produce uniformity of belief. Furthermore, I believe that preachers, if they have access to adequate training and quality resources, need to be able to articulate a cogent argument

² See Matt 7:1–5; Mark 7:9–13; 2 Tim 2:15; Titus 2:7b–8; Jas 3:1–6; Rev 3:17.

for their hermeneutical positions and *against* conflicting positions and be humble enough to abandon a position if the evidence justifies it.

My view of homiletics is also rooted in ethics. In contexts where listeners believe the message proclaimed and the “applications” given derive from the message of the preaching text(s), I believe that preachers are ethically required to take serious steps to do just that. Many preachers do not have access to quality hermeneutical training and resources, but for those who do it is borderline unethical if they ignore the opportunities before them.

Table 5.4. Survey Responses: Audience Expectations of Evangelical Preaching

Response	Number of Respondents
When I preach, my listeners believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s)	12
When I preach, my listeners want the message I preach and the applications I give to be biblical, but my listeners don't expect my message and applications to derive from my preaching text(s).	1

Within these theological, philosophical, and ethical constraints, I believe that preachers are free to use wisdom to craft their sermons.

The first lesson I learned is that pastors tend to misunderstand the nature of application. Following Stephen Barton et al., application is an actionable exhortation or exemplification that derives from the passage(s) cited’s *pericopal theology*.³ When

³ Stephen C. Barton, “New Testament Interpretation as Performance,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 2 (1999); John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 258, 279–80; William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 2004), 477–82; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 477; Daniel Overdorf, *Applying the Sermon: How to Balance Biblical Integrity and Cultural Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 21–30; Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 86–96; Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 106–11.

respondents were asked how they might apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life, three-fourths of their answers did not fit this definition of application. Table 5.5 illustrates the kinds of answers that were given and the reason(s) why they are not applications.

Table 5.5. Examples of Non-Application Responses to Questions in Table 5.1

Response	ID	Example of Non-Application (vv.)	Reason for Deficiency
	3	David's sin was a result of a process of letting sin in (2 Sam 11:1–5).	Not actionable: Descriptive Explanation of Text
	6	Temptation's pull (2 Sam 11:1–5). Lies, the ultimate goal of sin (2 Sam 8–15). Accountability in friendships (2 Sam 12:1–7).	Not actionable: Incomplete Ideas/Not Actionable (If applied) Does Not Derive From Text: Violates How Old Testament Narrative Communicates Its Message
	17	You reap what you sow, sowing seeds of sin leads to more sin (2 Sam 11:2–3).	Does Not Derive From Text: Violates How Old Testament Narrative Communicates Its Message
	25	Just as David, an ancient near eastern monarch, exercised culturally acceptable "entitlements" (e.g., not going to war ...), so we often behave in "culturally acceptable" ways that are unjust in the sight of God (2 Sam 11:1–4, 27; 12:1–7).	Not actionable: Historical and Cultural Exegesis (If applied) Does Not Derive From Text: Violates How Old Testament Narrative Communicates Its Message

The second lesson I learned is that seminary-trained pastors rate their seminary's job of equipping them to interpret and apply Old Testament narratives too highly. Table 5.6 displays the high opinion of seminary graduates toward their graduate training in Old Testament narratives.

Table 5.6. Pre-Reading, Seminary Graduates' Opinion of Old Testament Narrative Training

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel my master's level coursework in biblical studies did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply Old Testament narratives.	2	7	0	0	0

If seminary graduates should be able to identify narrative *pericopes* and apply their theology faithfully—and I think they should be able to—then these graduates have rated their seminary training too highly. Of the nine seminary graduates in the survey, only respondents 27 and 28 identified 2 Samuel 11–12 as a single pericope in their pre-reading responses. Eight of the nine, pre-reading, selected preaching texts based on the identification of a scene or the principles they “saw” illustrated in the pericope. While it is not mandatory that pericopes be selected as preaching portions, it is difficult to see how preachers can generally avoid misapplication without doing so.

The third lesson I learned is that pastors rate their ability to interpret and apply Old Testament narratives too highly. Twelve of the thirteen respondents said “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” when asked, pre-reading, to rate their ability in this area. Based on the discussions in the preceding lessons, it would appear that most have rated themselves too highly on this matter. This is a problem, because preachers who are not aware of their hermeneutical deficiencies are not likely to correct them.

The fourth lesson I learned is that pastors tend to see limited homiletical value in scholarly commentaries on Old Testament narratives. Table 5.7 demonstrates that over sixty percent of respondents claimed that scholarly commentaries rarely give them what they need or are not necessary to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply their preaching texts.

Table 5.7. Pre-Reading, Assessment of Scholarly Commentaries

Response	Number of Respondents
Scholarly commentaries give me everything I need to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narrative preaching text(s)	5
Scholarly commentaries are great, but rarely give me what I need to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply OT narrative preaching text(s)	7
Scholarly commentaries are not necessary for me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply my preaching text(s)	1

This illustrates the disconnect between scholarship and the pastorate and between commentary writing and sermon preparation. This is not a good sign, because it indicates that pastors are not asking enough good questions of Old Testament narratives during sermon preparation. The end result is sermons that do not display or reveal much of the *theological message* or rhetorical power inherent in Old Testament narratives. This is unfortunate, because doing so allows narratives to shape our own personal narrative by demonstrating through rich, carefully crafted stories that God alone is the one to trust.⁴ Like a mentor who transforms a mentee by reshaping the mentee's self-image through credible and consistent affirmation, so Old Testament narratives can transform people through credible and consistent testimony of the character of God our Savior.

The fifth lesson I learned is that pastors tend to retain the right to craft their own main points and *Take-Home Truths*. Nine of the thirteen respondents, including those who indicated that they are "Very Likely" to follow the approach of the reference tool, selected their own principle instead of one supplied by the survey or reference tool when asked which principle they would preach from 2 Samuel 11–12. This tendency has pros and cons. It is good, because preachers need to "own" their sermons—certainly there are other ways to express the same theological message. It is bad, because it led respondents to craft an incomplete or inaccurate principle when a complete and accurate one was available to them.

⁴ "It seems reasonable to assume that the authors of biblical narratives believed that if they told their flock about God's mighty deeds—how God saved the people in times of distress, how their fate was in God's hands, and how it paid to obey God—then the community of worshipers would keep its side of the covenant and remain faithful to God." Yaira Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 2.

Future Ministry Use of the Thesis-Project

The thesis-project will affect my future ministry in two ways. First, my preaching will benefit, because I am able to more quickly ascertain the theological messages of Old Testament narratives. This allows me to spend more time developing concrete application. Second, it provided excellent feedback so that any future teaching that I do on Old Testament narratives will be enhanced.

Recommendations

I will make two recommendations in light of the thesis-project. First, if I were to do the thesis-project over again, I would test the reference tool, first, on a small group of high school educated, middle-aged adults with little overt interest in the reference tool's contents. In my mind, if someone with no familiarity with the subject can understand and apply the reference tool, then I have designed a tool that most open-minded pastors can use. I feel that I did a good job of designing such a tool, but like a rocket launched into outer space, one significant design flaw can lead to a failed mission.

Second, I recommend that seminaries require students to demonstrate mastery of the principles of interpretation and display their mastery by faithfully applying texts of all major biblical genres prior to graduation. The value of a seminary education is reduced if students cannot avoid obvious hermeneutical errors in their handling of the biblical text. Since seminaries should not produce drones, students should be allowed to disagree on hermeneutical matters so long as they can capably defend their position against the position of their school.

Three changes will enable students to master the principles of interpretation and display their mastery by faithfully applying texts of all major genres prior to graduation. First, seminaries should require two hermeneutics courses, one at the beginning, the other at the end of all master’s level programs. This will allow students to see the hermeneutical big picture before diving into the nitty-gritty of exegetical courses, and then reorient students to the big picture before leaving seminary. The assignments should be frequent and short, designed to train students to ask important questions of texts, get answers from a minimum of five scholarly reference works plus an interlinear,⁵ and formulate their texts’ theological messages in exegetical, timeless, and contemporary language. Second, professors and departments need to dialogue with each other so that they understand each other on hermeneutical issues. In writing the thesis-project, I came across scholars from the same school misunderstanding and contradicting each other on seemingly resolvable issues, sometimes in the same book! Where agreement cannot occur, at least clarity can be achieved. Third, professors of Bible exposition and exegesis need to be stricter in the application sections of research papers. Students are so rarely exposed to sound hermeneutics that without their seminary professors requiring genuine application in such papers—under threat of the section’s rewrite—there is little chance that students will consistently preach expository messages.

⁵ In my experience, three-fourths of evangelical seminary students and graduates are unacquainted with or barely consult interlinears or scholarly lexicons, encyclopedias, introductions, or commentaries in sermon preparation. This is, in part, because students in exegesis courses interact almost exclusively with the Greek or Hebrew text—even though it is well known that few will retain facility in the original languages. Finding such original language work impractical for sermon preparation and unable to effectively use secondary sources, most seminary students and graduates—however unknowingly—preach sermons that are far from expository.

Area of Further Research

Further development is necessary on the ladder of abstraction. Moving from the time-specific expressions of theological messages to the contemporary expressions of Take-Home Truths requires legitimate hermeneutical bridges or links. Simply because a character in a narrative is an adulterer, father, employee, or person does not mean that a legitimate hermeneutical bridge or link can be established with contemporary marriage-covenant violators, fathers, employees, or people today.⁶ To illustrate, even though Psalm 1:5 refers to an earthly gathering of God's people, it is illegitimate to move up on the "ladder of abstraction" to church gatherings today. This is because the earthly gathering referred to in the text is not representative of a gathered community of God's people, but of God's ultimate judgment.⁷

This thesis-project sought to promote the aims of expository preaching by identifying the problem of many evangelical preachers' failure to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. It was grounded in a theology of preaching that takes God and his Word seriously. It arose from a literature review of philosophical and practical hermeneutics. It produced a user-friendly reference tool that enables preachers to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. It created and carried out a survey that demonstrated that the reference tool immediately enhanced the ability of evangelical pastors to deliver expository messages from Old Testament narratives. It is

⁶ Mathewson makes this very mistake, see Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 86.

⁷ Samuel L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 74–76; Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 98–99.

my prayer that God will use this thesis-project to encourage God's people to abandon themselves to God's redemptive purposes. To God alone be the glory!

APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Opening Page with Instructions

Thank you for participating in this survey. It is being conducted as part of a doctoral program in preaching. The purpose of this survey is to receive feedback on a Reference Tool being developed to help pastors preach Old Testament narratives.

In the survey that follows, there are no “right,” “wrong,” “desirable,” or “undesirable” answers, only your honest responses. All responses are anonymous and will in no way be traceable to individual respondents.

Please set aside 90 minutes—continuous and uninterrupted—to complete this survey as it must be completed in one sitting. Most of this time will be spent reading the Reference Tool. Before you begin, please grab a Bible and have access to a printer from this computer so that you can print out the Reference Tool.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Ben Walton

Qualifying Questions

1) Are you a pastor on staff at a church?

() Yes () No

2) Do you believe in the Trinity?

() Yes () No

3) Do you believe that salvation comes by faith in Jesus Christ alone?

() Yes () No

4) Do you believe that the Bible is the final authority on matters of theology and Christian living?

() Yes () No

5) Do you believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture?

() Yes () No

Education

6) What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

() High School () Masters
() Some College () Doctorate
() Bachelors

7) Have you completed any Master's level courses?

() Yes () No

8) Have you completed any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

() Yes () No

9) Have you earned a Master's degree in biblical studies? (e.g., M.A., M.Div., Th.M.)

() Yes () No

10) What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

() M.A. () D.Min.
() M.Div. () Ph.D.
() Th.M.

11) I graduated with this degree

() Before 1980 () Between 1995 and 1999
() Between 1980 and 1984 () Between 2000 and 2004
() Between 1985 and 1989 () Between 2005 and 2011
() Between 1990 and 1994

12) Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

() Yes () No

13) How many Master's level semester units in biblical studies have you completed?

1 to 14 (about 1-5 courses) 30 to 44 (about 10-15 courses)
 15 to 29 (about 5-10 courses) 45 to 59 (about 15-20 courses)

14) When did you last take a Master's course in biblical studies?

Before 1980 Between 1995 and 1999
 Between 1980 and 1984 Between 2000 and 2004
 Between 1985 and 1989 Between 2005 and 2011
 Between 1990 and 1994

Opinion of Graduate Training Pertaining To OT Narratives

15) I feel my Master's level coursework in biblical studies did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply Old Testament narratives.

Strongly Agree Disagree
 Agree Strongly Disagree
 Neutral

Self-Assessment: Ability to Interpret/Apply OT Narratives

16) I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply Old Testament narratives.

Strongly Agree Disagree
 Agree Strongly Disagree
 Neutral

About Listeners

17) When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).
 want the message I preach and the applications I give to be biblical, but my listeners don't expect my message and applications to derive from my preaching text(s).

View of Scholarly Commentaries

18) When I preach from Old Testament narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

() give me everything I need to accurately interpret and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

() are great, but rarely give me what I need to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

() are not necessary for me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

19) What scholarly commentary series do you most commonly use? (max 10 words)

Instructions: Read 2 Samuel 11-12

Please take 5-10 minutes to read 2 Samuel 11-12 before clicking "Next" and continuing on in the survey.

Pre-Reading Questions on 2 Samuel 11-12

20) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11-12? (more than one answer is allowed)

[] 1	[] 6
[] 2	[] 7
[] 3	[] 8
[] 4	[] 9
[] 5	[] 10+

How did you decide to preach that number of sermons? (max 50 words)

21) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11-12 to life? For each statement, indicate which verse(s) the application is based on. (max 100 words)

22) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11-12 teaches believers today? (one sentence)

23) Of the following options, which sentence best represents the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11-12 teaches believers today?

Answers appear in computer generated random order.

- Adultery is a dangerous sin that has devastating consequences.
- God will use us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.
- When we fail to walk with God, we put our life, family, and career in jeopardy.
- The characteristics of a troubled leader are idleness, willful disobedience, covering up, and hypocrisy.
- [Text of answer from question 22]

24) If you had to choose one, which of the following principles or messages would you preach from 2 Samuel 11-12?

Answers appear in computer generated random order.

- Adultery is a dangerous sin that has devastating consequences.
- God will use us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.
- When we fail to walk with God, we put our life, family, and career in jeopardy.
- The characteristics of a troubled leader are idleness, willful disobedience, covering up, and hypocrisy.
- [Text of answer from question 22]

What led you to make this selection? (max 50 words)

Reference Tool Instructions

The following link is to a reference tool designed to help pastors preach Old Testament narratives. After clicking on the link and printing out the Reference Tool, please take 35-50 minutes to read it in its entirety prior to continuing the survey.

To open and print the Reference Tool, click here.

Reminder to Read Reference Tool

Please read the Reference Tool in its entirety before continuing on.

If you have not printed it out yet, [click here](#).

Instructions: Post-Reading

Many of the following questions are similar to questions that you answered prior to reading the Reference Tool.

As you answer these questions, please remember that there are no "right," "wrong," "desirable," or "undesirable" answers, only your honest responses.

Like all surveys, the credibility of this survey is dependent upon the honest, straightforward responses of all participants.

Post-Reading: How Likely to Use Approach?

25) Having read and assessed the value of the Reference Tool for your own preaching—how likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool when preparing sermons on Old Testament narratives?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very Likely	<input type="checkbox"/> Unlikely
<input type="checkbox"/> Likely	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Unlikely
<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's approach? (max 75 words)

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's approach? When might you depart from it? (max 75 words)

What did the Reference Tool need to do to demonstrate the validity of its approach? From what you know about the interpretation and application of Old Testament narratives, what causes you doubt about the need to use the Reference Tool's approach? (max 75 words)

If you would use the Reference Tool or its approach when preparing to preach from Old Testament narratives, then please use the Reference Tool now to answer the following questions.

Conversely, if you would not use the Reference Tool or its approach, then please put the Reference Tool aside now as you answer the following questions.

If you would use the Reference Tool or its approach in a limited way, then please use the Reference Tool now in that same limited way to answer the following questions.

Post-Reading Questions on 2 Samuel 11-12

26) Having read and assessed the value of the Reference Tool for your own preaching—how many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11-12? (more than one answer is allowed)

<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 9
<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 10+

How did you decide to preach that number of sermons? (max 50 words)

27) Having read and assessed the value of the Reference Tool for your own preaching—what is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11-12 teaches believers today? (one sentence)

Your original answer was: [Text of answer from question 22]

28) Having read and assessed the value of the Reference Tool for your own preaching—of the following options, which sentence best represents the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11-12 teaches believers today?

Answers appear in computer generated random order.

- () Adultery is a dangerous sin that has devastating consequences.
- () God will use us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.
- () When we fail to walk with God, we put our life, family, and career in jeopardy.
- () The characteristics of a troubled leader are idleness, willful disobedience, covering up, and hypocrisy.

() [Text of answer from question 27]

29) Having read and assessed the value of the Reference Tool for your own preaching—if you had to choose one, which of the following principles or messages would you preach from 2 Samuel 11-12?

Answers appear in computer generated random order.

- Adultery is a dangerous sin that has devastating consequences.
- God will use us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.
- When we fail to walk with God, we put our life, family, and career in jeopardy.
- The characteristics of a troubled leader are idleness, willful disobedience, covering up, and hypocrisy.
- [Text of answer from question 27]

30) Below is your response to the pre-reading question, "In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11-12 to life? For each statement, indicate which verse(s) the application is based on."

Post-reading, how would you classify these statements (e.g., application, misapplication, personal reflection, etc.)?

For those statements that you no longer consider to be application, what place, if any, do they have in the sermon?

Optional Questions Pertaining to Reference Tool

31) OPTIONAL. What, if anything, has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate? (max 100 words)

32) OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why? (max 100 words)

33) OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why? (max 100 words)

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your participation has been very helpful.

APPENDIX B

ANSWERS TO SELECT SURVEY QUESTIONS

RESPONDENT ID: 3

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

Yes

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

M.A.

I graduated with this degree

Between 2005 and 2011

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework . . . did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Strongly Agree

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Strongly Agree

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

are great, but rarely give me what I need to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach? When might you depart from it?
Identifying the main players and the most Scripture devoted to specific time periods was very helpful and eye opening. I don't know that I would always try to tie the stories in with the Old Covenant, only because many of the lessons to learn are timeless, regardless of the covenant they were written under.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

2, 3, or 4

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

I feel that there is more to teach on (the factors leading up to David's sin), the theology in God's forgiveness vs. consequences, etc.) than one sermon can handle, but I do believe that for the . . . audience we should keep the story moving.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

2

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

[I'd] take one sermon to explain the approach to the story, and how we need to read it. It seems like we'd need to undo a lot of thought processes before really diving in well. I'd spend the first sermon introducing. The second would cover both chapters.

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

David's sin was a result of a process of letting sin in.

Not being where he should be, noticing temptation, seeking information, pursuing opportunity (11:1–5). Sin begets more sin until truth is revealed (11:6–27). David's character vs. Uriah's character (David was self-focused, Uriah was out-focused) (11:4 vs. 11:8–11; 11:14—ironically, Uriah carries his death sentence in his hands, because he's trustworthy). God's forgiveness doesn't discount consequences (12:1–14, emphasizing 13–14). God's blessings in his grace, but keeping his promises of consequences and discipline—such as David receiving a new baby, but being called out to battle (12:7–14; 15–23, 24–25, 26–31).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

We are all in danger of sin and we must prepare for consequences, but be relieved by God's forgiveness.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

God will use us to bring salvation to this world, but there are still consequences for our sin even in the midst of his grace.

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Post-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

How I break down a passage (namely a narrative) to preach it. I need to rethink how I come up with speaking series.

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

I liked the Studying the Text and Identify the Theological and Historical Contexts sections. I struggled a little bit with the hump from "God will use repentant kings" to "God will use us." It seemed like the same dangerous lines of thought described in Contemporizing the Exegetical Idea. In fact, the example about David is almost exactly the same feel as the jump you made in your example of what TO do.

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

No. There are already too many resources out there to realistically be able to use and I didn't feel I really needed any more. I was pretty comfortable with the resources I use. I'd use this one for sure, just because it had very practical contextual analysis ideas.

RESPONDENT ID: 6

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

No [has a Bachelor's Degree/major is unknown]

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

No

[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

I graduated with this degree

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework ... did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Neutral [took less than 15 semester units]

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

give me everything I need to accurately interpret and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Neutral

What did the reference tool need to do to demonstrate the validity of its approach? From what you know about the interpretation and application of OT narratives, what causes you doubt about the need to use the Reference Tool's approach?

It needed to convince me of the validity of its approach.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

4

How did you decide to preach that number ...?

Based on the topics I was able to pull from reading it through once.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

4

How did you decide to preach that number ...?

I would still take 4 sermons on it. I believe that multiple biblical truths can be pulled from this narrative. I don't believe David only learned one lesson from this part of his life.

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

Temptation's pull (11:1–5). Lies, the ultimate goal of sin (11:8–15). Accountability in friendships (12:1–7). God's redemption (12:24–25).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

God redeems our mistakes.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

While informative, I believe that it hasn't caused me to reevaluate how I approach study or application of OT narratives

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

I would be interested in purchasing a book similar to the reference tool. It was easy to understand and is a great way of simply explaining the CUT.

RESPONDENT ID: 17

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

No [has a Bachelor's Degree/major is unknown]

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

No

[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

I graduated with this degree

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework . . . did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

give me everything I need to accurately interpret and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach? When might you depart from it?

I was taught to study the Bible in a similar way. If I failed in planning and did not have the time, I would deviate.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

6 or 10+

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

I refer to it numerous times. There are a good number of teaching points and practical application points for youth.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

10+

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

My school of thought with youth ministry is "specific interpretation, broad application." I see many broad application points that I can teach.

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

Flee temptation. David sees her and finds out she is married. ... You reap what you sow, sowing seeds of sin leads to more sin (11:2–3). David sleeps with her, she gets pregnant and then he conspires to deceive which leads to Uriah's death (11:4–15). God sees all. God saw and knew what David did and he was not pleased, even though David might have thought he had gotten away with it (11:27). God forgives those with a repentant heart. David says, "I have sinned" ... He had a repentant heart and God's response to that ... (12:13).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

No matter how far deep a hole you have dug yourself through sin, God forgives and is there for you if you trust Him.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

The time I spend studying and my methods.

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

No, I was taught to study in a way similar to this. The question is time management in my case. Will I plan ahead enough to make time to study and find lessons for the youth that have relevant practical application and doctrinal meat.

RESPONDENT ID: 18

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

No [but has a Master's Degree in a different field]

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

Yes

[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

I graduated with this degree

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework ... did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Neutral [has taken less than 15 semester units]

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Neutral

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

are great, but rarely give me what I need to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach? When might you depart from it?
It puts the different parts of interpretation into a simple one page template.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

2

How did you decide to preach that number ... ?
I would preach on each chapter.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

1

How did you decide to preach that number ... ?

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

Be committed to our calling (11:1). Guard our hearts (11:2–5). Sin always compounds (11:1–25). God is a holy God (12:1). God is not mocked (12:7–15). Sin has consequences (12:14). God is gracious (12:13, 24).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? [free response]

God is holy, righteous, and good, and while he will discipline us in our sin he continues to be gracious and longsuffering.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? [free response]

God is holy; he will discipline us in our sin yet he is gracious and longsuffering and his plan of salvation will not be thwarted.

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? [multiple choice]

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? [multiple choice]

[Same as Post-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

RESPONDENT ID: 19**Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?**

Yes

[If no.] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?**[If yes.] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?**

M.Div.

I graduated with this degree

Between 2005 and 2011

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework . . . did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

are great, but rarely give me what I need to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach? When might you depart from it?

It took seriously the Biblical authority of the stories while also maintaining the “humanness” of the text (i.e., the literary devices and plot development, etc.). It also took sufficient note of biblical-theological considerations in drafting the theological message/take home truth. For example, [how] does a specific OT narrative concept apply in the New Covenant Kingdom?

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

3 or 5

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

I could preach according to some of the narrative chunks that I saw present in the text (David's sin, Nathan's confrontation, the consequences of David's sin, etc.) or I could preach from the point of view of each character in the narrative (God, David, Bathsheba, Nathan, etc.).

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

1, 3, or 4

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

I could preach one large overarching sermon on the text or I could preach three or four sermons on the sections I mentioned previously showing how each section contributes to the one message at large.

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

God's covenant promise is kept for those who live in humility and repentance (12:13–15). Sin ends in death and hurt (11:26 & 12:15b–19). Sin has a blinding effect on our reasoning and conscience (12:1–7). In Jesus Christ we have a king who knows no sin or injustice. He pleads the case of the down-trodden (it's hard for me to indicate verses here. I'm thinking of the narrative as a whole and contrasting the kingship of David to the Kingship of Christ. This serves as an application of comfort to those who need a Savior and who need justice.).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

Sin, though at times alluring, will in fact lead only to pain because it rebels against God and alienates our fellow humanity.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

When we fail to walk with God, we put our life, family, and career in jeopardy.

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?**OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?****OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?**

Yes I would and will still purchase this Reference Tool if it becomes available.

RESPONDENT ID: 22

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

Yes

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

M.A.

I graduated with this degree

Between 1995 and 1999

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework ... did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

want the message I preach and the applications I give to be biblical, but my listeners don't expect my message and applications to derive from my preaching text(s)

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

are great, but rarely give me what I need to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Very Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach?

Emphasis on faithful theological message and the work that it takes to achieve. Not easy, but "doable." Approach to CUT is very helpful as well as how to eventually give the Take-Home Truth without being unfaithful to the message. The checklist is very helpful.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

4

How did you decide to preach that number ...?

Set up of the two chapters. Natural beginning and ending of the different narratives. Flow of the themes of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and consequences.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

1

How did you decide to preach that number ...?

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

David remained in Jerusalem, his first wrong step. Not doing what he was supposed to be doing (11:1). Lust and temptation leading to sin (11:3–4). Consequences of sin (11:5). Trying to cover up sin (11:6–13). Sin causes wickedness and desperation (11:14). Godly confrontation (12:1–12). Realization and repentance/forgiveness and consequences of sin despite forgiveness (12:13). Repentance (12:20). Restoration (12:24–25).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

The consequences of sin are great, but our great God always heals and restores in light of true repentance.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

God rules and His plans always prevail, but there are consequences for sin.

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

God will use us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

God will use us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

Just reevaluating my seriousness in not misrepresenting God's Word. It is true, I get upset when I see Scripture misused or loosely interpreted and misinterpreted, but I can easily fall into the trap myself if I am unwilling to take the time to study and stay true to original meaning, message, and readers.

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

Checklist is very helpful. I will also be rereading the whole paper and will keep as a reference.

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

Absolutely.

RESPONDENT ID: 24

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

Yes

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

M.Div.

I graduated with this degree

Between 2005 and 2011

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework . . . did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

want the message I preach and the applications I give to be biblical, but my listeners don't expect my message and applications to derive from my preaching text(s)

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

are great, but rarely give me what I need to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach? When might you depart from it?

The fact that it assists you through the passage. When it departs from explaining the Scriptures.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

4

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

Based on the different sections of the passage, that is, based on the different story lines and the different hunks in the passage (i.e., David's unfaithfulness, David's deceitfulness and murder, David's encounter with Nathan, and David's loss of his son).

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

4

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

Based on the different sections of the passage.

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

The lust of the eyes may direct you to deeper sins (11:2). Sin lurks at the door of those who neglect the word of the Lord (11:5–6). Marital unfaithfulness is not part of God's design. One unconfessed sin leads to another sin (11:15). It is important to be held accountable for sin no matter what position you hold (e.g., David was a king when Nathan confronted him). God will even break down the heart of a king (12:3). Confession makes you right with God (12:3). Sin is never without consequences (loss of David's son).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

Sin can affect even men after God's own heart, but forgiveness continues to be offered by the merciful God, though sin cannot go without consequences.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

RESPONDENT ID: 25**Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?**

Yes

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?**[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?**

M.A.

I graduated with this degree

Between 2005 and 2011

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework . . . did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

are great, but rarely give me what I need to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach? When might you depart from it?

Preaching a text using complete units of thought makes sense for expository preaching—especially if we are claiming our authority comes from the Scriptures. I would likely depart from it if a certain aspect of the text (e.g., subsection, secondary applicable point, etc.) might speak better to a congregation going through a certain set of circumstances (early Christian exegesis from Paul's letters regularly deviates from the "CUT").

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

3

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

I quickly surveyed the passage for homiletically manageable sections which provide a broad enough context and one or two prospects for important applicable points.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

1

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?**(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]**

With only this abbreviated study of the passage, I'd say the following might be helpful for application: (1) When we get comfortable in our privileged position or blessings, and we don't live on purpose, we often find ourselves with great opportunities for sin (11:1–2), (2) Just as David, as an ancient near eastern monarch, exercised culturally acceptable "entitlements" (e.g., not going to war, enjoy sexual privileges, etc.), so we often behave in "culturally acceptable" ways that are unjust in the sight of God (11:1–4, 27; 12:1–7), (3) We live our lives with God as our primary audience, not man (11:27–12:7).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

Whether you are a king or a pauper, God requires justice.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

God longs to bless and use individuals wholly devoted to him and he will discipline those who ignore his will—regardless of their status.

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

Whether you are a king or a pauper, God requires justice.

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

God longs to bless and use individuals wholly devoted to him and he will discipline those who ignore his will—regardless of their status.

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

It has challenged me to select a passage (CUT) using more methodologically consistent criteria.

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

Of particular helpfulness was the section on "CUTs" as well as the section on common errors (e.g., springboarding). The introduction seemed to rely a bit too much on broad generalizations and does not grapple with the homiletical use of Scripture that we see in the NT (e.g., Hebrews' use of the Psalms or Paul's use of Genesis in Galatians 4:21–28).

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

Probably not. The only reason for this is [that] numerous homiletical books I already have cover similar territory and Fee and Stuart's "Read the Bible for All Its Worth," for example, deals with many of these issues. If these were not in my library already, however, I would certainly purchase this resource.

RESPONDENT ID: 26**Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?**

Yes

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

M.Div.

I graduated with this degree

Between 2005 and 2011

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework . . . did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

are great, but rarely give me what I need to craft accurate main point(s) and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Very Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach?

It had a clearly stated purpose to help navigate through OT narrative in order to use it correctly and effectively in preaching and applying it to the Christian life. It broke down the whole approach to the text step-by-step, from how to correctly make a CUT, set the context, read through the text, and point out things to take note of in order to discern the Biblical principle and formulate a THT.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

6 or 10+

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

Following the narrative: (1) David's sin, (2) Exacerbating the sin by trying to cover it up, (3) Nathan rebukes David, (4) the Lord's judgment on David, (5) David mourns, (6) God gets his way. Also, sermons based on a point of view from the characters involved through the whole story: (7) David, (8) Uriah, (9) Nathan, (10) Bathsheba, (11) Joab.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

1

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

When we sin and try to cover it up or "fix" it by our own strength instead of confessing and repenting/turning back toward the Lord, we only dig a bigger hole and make it worse for ourselves (2 Samuel 11:27). When confronted with our own sin we should humbly confess before God and brace for the consequences (2 Samuel 12:13–14). Through mourning our sin, repentance, and restoration we can once again worship our Lord (2 Samuel 12:20). In the end, God ultimately gets his way as seen by the fact that David goes to war (2 Samuel 12:29).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

In the face of our blatant sin and rebellion against God, forgiveness and restoration are still available to us no matter how far we've fallen.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

God uses us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

God will use us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

God will use us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

It has caused me to reevaluate how I break up Complete Units of Thought in Scripture and how I try to fit the text into a preaching style and not the other way around.

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

The worksheet was very helpful, but the statistics in the boxes were a little confusing and I felt I needed a little more direction and explanation.

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

Yes, I would have previously been interested in a book similar to the reference tool. I love OT narratives, but shy away from preaching from them too much. Especially in a climate where famous preachers proudly NEVER preach from the OT I think it is a shame and a skill that is lacking in modern preaching. When it is undertaken, it is moralized, modernized, and completely stripped of its theological and practical power.

RESPONDENT ID: 27

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

Yes

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

M.Div.

I graduated with this degree

Between 1980 and 1984

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework ... did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

want the message I preach and the applications I give to be biblical, but my listeners don't expect my message and applications to derive from my preaching text(s)

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

give me everything I need to accurately interpret and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach? When might you depart from it?
It is similar to the approach I already use.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

3 or 4

How did you decide to preach that number ... ?

It is one story, but has a number of themes that develop through to the end. I would start at the beginning and preach each theme until it came to a conclusion in David's restoration.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

3 or 4

How did you decide to preach that number ... ?

I still feel I can preach 3–4 sermons that lead up to one central message from these chapters.

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

It is easy to fall into temptation (11:2). We try to cover sinfulness and disobedience (11:10). We rationalize sin, convincing ourselves and others that it was acceptable even wise (11:25). We see sin in others, but it takes intervention to see our own sin (12:5). David was quick to repent, but we keep rationalizing even when our sin has been pointed out to us (12:13). Even when we repent, there are still consequences (12:14). Discipline from the Lord can bring us closer to him, but often instead we get angry and run away from him (12:22).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? [free response]

God hates sin and cannot ignore it, but by repentance restoration is assured through His love and grace.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? [free response]

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? [multiple choice]

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? [multiple choice]

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

Nothing really. It is a wonderful tool and consistent with the way I am already thinking.

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

Yes. I would love a tool like this at any time. I did not have to change my mind.

RESPONDENT ID: 28

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

Yes

[If no,] **Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?**

[If yes,] **What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?**

M.A.

I graduated with this degree

Between 2005 and 2011

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework . . . did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Strongly Agree

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Strongly Agree

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

give me everything I need to accurately interpret and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Unlikely

What did the Reference Tool need to do to demonstrate the validity of its approach? From what you know about interpretation and application of OT narratives, what causes you doubt about the need to use the Reference Tool's approach?

There were areas of disagreement with the content of the Reference Tool which the max word count will not allow me to unpack. (A major contention would be, "...the essential qualities the text uses of David being qualities of New Covenant believers . . . shows itself to be a hermeneutically sound move." I disagree.) Furthermore, the Reference Tool makes mechanical what should happen organically. I naturally do 90% of what it recommends, but don't use a check-off list.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

1, 2, 3, or 4

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

The passage could easily be preached in a single message capturing the whole of the account (which would work great for a 1st person narrative sermon). If desired, the text could be broken down into scenes that follow the plot development of the text itself in keeping with the storyline.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

1, 2, 3, or 4

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

See my earlier response.

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

In spite of our sin, God is faithful to his covenant and gracious to his people (2 Samuel 11–12). God justly and providentially brings about individual and communal consequences for sin (2 Samuel 11–12). Sin on earth cannot be hidden from the righteous God of heaven (2 Samuel 11–12). The pleasures of obedience to God (2 Samuel 2 Samuel 12:24–31) far outweigh the illusory delights of this world (2 Samuel 11:1–12:23).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? [free response]

In spite of our sin and its consequences, God is faithful to his covenant and gracious to His people.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? [free response]

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? [multiple choice]

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? [multiple choice]

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

It caused me to reevaluate the effectiveness of using such a tool in training young preachers in the local church. In my career as a pastor, I have trained a dozen preachers and I never used a "reference tool" approach. Instead, I take biblically qualified trainees through readings on hermeneutics and homiletics. I then have them practice preaching and give them feedback. This reference tool would be helpful in training preachers. I would teach them to use it as crutches while their legs strengthen in the pulpit until they do it organically without the tool in hand.

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing?

Why?

The Reference Tool was not helpful to me personally as it is very much what I received in my ministerial training. It was clear and I am sure it would be "impactful [sic]" to someone who has had little exposure to hermeneutics and homiletics. I was slightly frustrated by the typos in the PDF and with points of disagreement concerning the argument that Israel's King David should be correlated to a Christian on the grounds that he was anointed by the Spirit, because it is an entirely different kind of anointing than what is received in the New Covenant.

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

Prior to the survey I would not have purchased a tool like this, nor after (unless it was authored by a seasoned preacher I admired). After reading the tool, I may purchase it or something like it as a tool for training others. It was like a condensed version of a class I took in seminary on preaching narratives. It could benefit preachers who do not have the luxury of a formal seminary experience (which the majority of preachers around the globe don't). On a superficial note, I'd like to see Pastors John, Shawn, and Ron renamed in the final version.

RESPONDENT 31

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

Yes

[If no,] Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?

[If yes,] What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?

M.Div.

I graduated with this degree

Between 2000 and 2004

[If applicable,] I feel my Master's level coursework . . . did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

give me everything I need to accurately interpret and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Very Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach?

This was very illuminating. It helps you to have a bird's eye view about the text, see the main points and refocus. It is very easy to "see" ethical points here and there and preach "do as so and so did" and "not do as so and so did" and miss the whole point of the text.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

2 or 3

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

I checked how the passage is divided up into parts in two/three Bibles. Later, when I would do more research, I may reduce it to two or I may see the need for more sermons.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

1

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

Conditions that pave the way for temptations (11:1–4).

Sin cannot be concealed, sooner or later it or its consequences will be revealed (11:5). It's much easier to see others' weakness and judge them (12:5–6). The importance of having a wise, mature Christian to be accountable to (12:1, 7–10). Sin has consequences despite forgiveness (12:11–18). Real repentance has fruits (12:24–25, 29–31).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

All of us are vulnerable and prone to sinning, but God is merciful. Instead of judging others let's trust in God's mercy in humility.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

God will use us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

The characteristics of a troubled leader are idleness, willful disobedience, covering up, and hypocrisy.

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Post-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

The importance of good commentaries that together with details help us to have an overall understanding of the historical context and the theological message of the book and the passage.

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

Because I am a slow reader I was not able to read the text word-by-word, so I did not get the statistics part well. I found chapters two and three helpful. The table on page 13 is really helpful and I will use it.

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

I would buy such a tool before this survey, but after the survey I will not miss any chance to get one.

RESPONDENT 32

Have you earned a Master's Degree in biblical studies?

No [has a Bachelor's Degree/major is unknown]

[If no,] **Are you currently enrolled in any Master's level courses in biblical studies?**

No

[If yes,] **What is the highest degree you have earned in biblical studies?**

I graduated with this degree

[If applicable,] **I feel my Master's level coursework . . . did an excellent job of training me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.**

I feel confident in my ability to accurately interpret and faithfully apply OT narratives.

Agree

When I preach, my listeners

believe that the message I preach and the applications I give derive from my preaching text(s).

When I preach from OT narratives, I feel that scholarly commentaries—those with lots of footnotes and frequent references to the original languages

are not necessary for me to accurately interpret and faithfully apply my preaching text(s).

(Post-Reading) How likely are you to closely follow the approach of the Reference Tool [in the future]?

Likely

What did you find appealing about the Reference Tool's Approach? When might you depart from it?

I really liked the organization of it. I felt like it was clear and logical. I especially liked "Step 2: Identifying the Theological/Historical Context. The reason I liked Step 2 was because it was a step which would not take long to do, but was helpful in framing the CUT. The times when I would depart from it would solely be due to time constraints.

(Pre-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

2, 4, or 6

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

The number of sermons would depend on the group that I was preaching to and the depth that I was aiming for. Two sermons would be really hard for me to do. Probably four sermons would be the most natural length.

(Post-Reading) How many sermons might you take to preach 2 Samuel 11–12?

2

How did you decide to preach that number . . . ?

I think that it might detract from the overall message to do too many sermons on it.

(Pre-Reading) In a sermon, what might you say to apply 2 Samuel 11–12 to life? [with verse references]

Importance of being responsible/fulfilling duties (11:1).

When temptation presents itself, do not allow yourself to dwell on it/pursue it (11:3). Don't plan to do wickedness (11:3, 4, 6, 11, 15 based on the messenger being sent to find out about Bathsheba, the messengers being sent to bring Bathsheba to David, David sending for Uriah, David trying to get Uriah to sleep with his wife, and the order to send Uriah to his death). The way in which Uriah lives according to his convictions/concern for the ark/army (11:11). Principle of reaping and sowing (12:11–12). David's immediate repentance and forgiveness (12:13).

(Pre-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

Believers need to be engaged in the responsibilities that God has them in so that they do not invite idleness, temptation, and sin.

(Post-Reading) What is the primary principle or message that 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches believers today? (free response)

[Same as Pre-Reading Free Response Answer Above]

(Pre-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

When we fail to walk with God, we put our life, family, and career in jeopardy.

(Post-Reading) Which of the following principles would you preach from 2 Samuel 11–12? (multiple choice)

[Same as Pre-Reading Multiple Choice Answer Above]

OPTIONAL. What, if anything has this Reference Tool caused you to reevaluate?

The way in which I prepare sermons. I think that this was helpful in causing me to think about how I can better organize my sermons and use my time in an efficient manner.

OPTIONAL. What sections of the Reference Tool were particularly impactful, helpful, frustrating, or confusing? Why?

OPTIONAL. Prior to participating in this survey, would you have purchased a book similar to this Reference Tool? How about now? Why?

I don't think I would have, but would consider it now. The reason is that I had pretty much figured that I could handle OT narratives/Scripture well enough to preach on it, but I am now thinking that I have a great deal of room for improvement. I think a reference tool/material that is not too dry/wordy could be really helpful.

Three pastors. Different backgrounds. The same struggle.

Pastor John

John has led First Church for five years. A graduate of National Seminary, he maintains some facility in the biblical languages. Whenever he preaches, he makes use of interlinears, lexicons, and the best commentaries. He's most comfortable in the NT letters, but occasionally preaches biblical narratives.

He's currently preaching through 2 Samuel. He's begun, however, to question how well he's doing. "Am I going too fast or too slow?" His goal is to preach one complete unit of thought (CUT) at a time, but he has difficulty figuring out where they begin and end. The commentaries are of little help, because they break passages up in all sorts of ways, and use terms like "literary unit" to describe everything from blocks of dialogue to ten or more chapters.

He's also questioning his application. He understands that it isn't something that preachers make up. It derives from the message of the text. He tends to use the old "When you are in a situation similar to the one in the biblical story, God will respond to you the way he responded to them" approach, but he's beginning to doubt its validity.

John's got the details down. What he needs is a competent reference tool—one designed for preachers—to help him formulate accurate messages so that he can preach OT narratives with biblical authority.

Pastor Shawn

Shawn has led Second Church for ten years. A former student of Regional Seminary, he spent a decade in ministry before becoming a Senior Pastor. He gave up trying to use scholarly commentaries years ago. "It's difficult to get much out of them. They're full of minutiae, addressing concerns few of us care about." What he finds most useful are the commentaries of Big Preacher.

Shawn would differ with anyone who questions the quality of his preaching—so would his congregation. He's no topical preacher.

"We preach verse-by-verse here." He's currently preaching through 2 Samuel, one chapter per week. A gifted preacher, he rarely questions the accuracy of his applications. He doesn't see it this way, but he "applies" the Bible by reading a few verses, sharing his personal reflections, reading a few more verses, and sharing more reflections.

Shawn wants to preach OT narratives with biblical authority, but needs a quality reference tool, one that bridges the gap between the sermon and scholarly commentaries.

Pastor Ron

Ron has led Third Church for fifteen years. He never went to seminary but has taken a few Bible classes. Currently, he's too busy with a thriving ministry to pursue a seminary education. Besides, what if seminary killed his ministry? It killed the ministry of Associate Pastor's Son. "He gave up a great future here, because seminary made him think that my preaching and evangelism are unbiblical."

Ron usually covers a variety of passages in his sermons. With OT narratives, however, he finds it better to stick with one passage. He sees important lessons in them: how to have hope and courage; how to be great husbands and wives; and how to pray, listen to God's voice, and discern his will. This week, he'll preach on how to avoid marital infidelity from 2 Samuel 11. He sees the value of commentaries for lecture preachers and never questions the accuracy of his applications, because he finds that most passages are pretty clear. When he needs it, he finds Favorite Author to be the best resource.

Ron values accuracy in preaching, but needs a credible reference tool, one that minimizes academic lingo, so that his messages from OT narratives can carry the weight of biblical authority.

John, Shawn, and Ron have the same struggle: to preach OT narratives with accuracy so that what they say carries the weight of biblical authority. This reference tool is for those like them.

APPENDIX C

REFERENCE TOOL

How Can This Reference Tool Enhance My Preaching?

This reference tool can enhance your preaching by teaching you the skills that are necessary to preach OT narratives with biblical authority. In doing so, it will also help you appreciate how OT narratives are designed so that you can proclaim them more powerfully.

Chapter 1 is a short course on what it means to preach with biblical authority with an emphasis on OT narratives. Chapter 2 outlines the skills that are necessary to preach OT narratives with biblical authority. It includes a one-page worksheet that allows you to see most of these skills in one place. Chapter 3 applies the skills of the previous chapter to 2 Samuel 11–12.

There is much more, of course, to sermon preparation. You'll need to go to quality reference works to fill in the details. You'll need to use your gifts to develop sermons that harness the power of the text to reach listeners' hearts. And, you'll need to show your congregation what it looks like to put the message of the text into practice.

Chapter 1

OT Narratives, Hermeneutics, and Biblical Authority

Accuracy in preaching has never been more important than it is today. In the 800s, it mattered less if preachers thought the Bible taught the earth was the center of the universe. Everyone believed that. In the 1400s, it mattered less if preachers taught a flat earth. People believed their clergy more than university professors.

Today when we misinterpret Scripture or assert knowledge of God or his will that the Bible doesn't teach, repercussions can be serious. A few years ago, I had the chance to witness to a young man who left the faith years earlier. He was a strip club bouncer. Knowing that I was a pastor, he asked me a number of Bible questions. My answers shocked him, because I was able to show him that the Bible didn't teach much of the well-intentioned legalism that he grew up with. No fancy interpretations were necessary. No in-depth analysis was needed. Only the most well accepted, but neglected, principles of biblical interpretation.

What Does It Mean to Preach with Biblical Authority?

Preaching with biblical authority means that our sermons accurately proclaim and apply the timeless message of their biblical preaching texts. It has little to do with whether the sermon is verse-by-verse, topical, or otherwise. It is often called “expository preaching” or “biblical preaching.” The benefit of preaching with biblical authority is significant: it renders our message God's message.

Preaching with biblical authority is rooted in the historic Christian belief that God is so different than us that the only reliable way to have knowledge of God or his will is through Scripture. Applied to the sermon, it's the idea that unless the message we preach and the applications we give derive from the message of our preaching text(s), there is a good chance we've misrepresented God.

Preaching and Hermeneutics

Preaching with biblical authority has one fundamental problem: it requires preachers. That's you and me. Keith Mathison once observed that no one “asserts that a Bible can enter a pulpit and preach itself. No one asserts that a Bible can read itself. Scripture cannot be interpreted or preached apart from some human agency.”¹ Since preaching with biblical authority is an activity more than a belief, it requires more than a theoretical commitment. It must be put into practice. Despite his profound admiration for us preachers, Haddon Robinson admits that preaching with biblical authority “has suffered severely in the pulpits of those claiming to be its friends.”²

To preach with biblical authority we must use sound hermeneutics. *Hermeneutics is the thoughtful process of discovering what a biblical text was designed to teach those it was originally written to so that we can faithfully apply it to our lives today.* It recognizes that serious, careful thought is necessary to interpret and apply the Bible. Hermeneutics is necessary to overcome the temptation to too hastily equate our thoughts with God's thoughts. When we preach without giving much thought to hermeneutics, we relegate the Bible to the status of a tool, a tool for us preachers to carry out our agenda—which always seems noble to us.

Hermeneutics 101: How Words and Genre Work Together to Communicate Messages

Sound hermeneutics requires an understanding of how communication works. The Bible, after all, is God's authoritative communication to us. There are three components of communication: words, genre, and message. “Words” refers to what we say; “genre” to the way we say it;

and “message” to the reason for saying it.³ When we decide to communicate, we first determine the point we want to make (message), then the way we want to say it (genre), and finally we express ourselves in words.

Of these three, genre is the most neglected by preachers. Genre is an essential clue to understanding the message of biblical texts, because it clues us in to the reading strategy—i.e., the hermeneutical principles—that the biblical author expects us to use. We practice genre analysis every day. We've all mastered the reading strategies of dozens of genres, including tax bills, political cartoons, parodies, fairy tales, editorials, and street signs. We don't think we're engaging in genre analysis, because these genres are common in our culture.

Words alone cannot communicate a message. Genre is necessary to make sense of words. Take the phrase “I am bad.” We're familiar with the wording, but what is the message? If intended ironically, the message is, “I think I'm cool.” If it's a mocking insult, the message is, “The person I'm speaking about thinks he's cool, but he's not.” If it's a heartfelt confession, the message is, “I believe that I am a bad person.”

In some genres, the words are similar to the message. In others, they are quite different. Let's say we want others to believe that our kids are great. If we want to be crystal clear but dry, we could use a declarative sentence. If we want to “wow” our listeners, we could use an anecdote. If we want to rouse the emotions, we could write a poem. Notice that even when the message is the same, the genre we couch it in affects our word choice:

¹ Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2001), 259.

² Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 21.

³ William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 2004), 169.

Genre: Declarative Sentence	Words: My kids are great.	Message: Believe my kids are great.
Genre: Anecdote	Words: I woke up, got coffee, heard laughs outside, and saw my kids washing my car.	Message: Believe my kids are great.
Genre: Poem	Words: Roses are red, violets are blue, my kids' hearts are true.	Message: Believe my kids are great.
The same dynamics are present in biblical communication. In some genres, the words are similar to the message; in others they are very different.		
Genre: Direct command (Ephesians 5:18a)	Words: Do not get drunk on wine.	Message: Do not get drunk on wine.
Genre: Parable (Matthew 13:44)	Words: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When found, the finder hides it, sells everything, and buys the field.	Message: Join the kingdom of heaven, it is more valuable than anything else.
Genre: Lament (Psalm 10)	Words: God, why do you hide? The wicked are prospering. God, fix the problem. God is great.	Message: When feeling like God is hiding in the midst of an unjust trial, God's people <i>can</i> express their feelings to God, call on God to fix the problem and, when they do, do it while maintaining full confidence that God is great.
Genre: OT Narrative (Genesis 11:1–9)	Words: After the flood, people don't disperse, endangering and defying God's redemptive plans, so God disperses them.	Message: It is futile to defy God's redemptive plans, because God's redemptive plans will prevail.

To give an example from recent history, a few years ago *The Da Vinci Code* caused quite a stir, because many read it more like a work of history than like the novel that it is. This was largely a result of the author employing a literary device in its opening pages to heighten interest in the story. The gullible public, unfamiliar with fiction's tools of the trade and unversed in historical Jesus studies, misread the book in droves, and made its author a very rich man. If misreading genre clues in secular literature can have deleterious effects, how much more when biblical literature is preached?

Hermeneutics 201: Comparing OT Narratives and NT Epistles

We call the message of a biblical text its theology. This is because the message is from God and it makes demands on our lives. It includes both the primary and ancillary theological principles that God inspired a text to communicate. A text's message/theology represents the future-oriented direction of the text. In other words, its goal is to get us to conform our lives to it going forward.

Old Testament narratives differ from NT epistles in three keys ways. The first is that OT narratives are a form of indirect communication. New Testament epistles are a form of direct communication. The messages of NT epistolary texts are clearer, more straightforward. They often use reason and logic to make their points. Old Testament narratives, however, seek to persuade by enrapturing us in their stories, thereby causing us to lower our defenses so that their messages can land easily and affectively on our hearts.

The second key difference between OT narratives and NT epistles is that the complete units of thought (CUTs) of OT narratives tend to be one to two chapters in length. The size of a NT epistolary CUT tends to be one to two paragraphs long. Identifying CUTs is crucial, because they provide the smallest unit of textual context that *must* be considered when interpreting anything within its boundaries.

The third key difference is that *unlike NT epistles*, OT narratives do a *lot of describing and not a lot of prescribing*. That is, they say a lot about what happened and only a little about what should have happened or must happen in the future. Compare 2 Samuel 11:1 with Colossians 2:6–7:

2 Samuel 11:1 (OT Narrative)	Colossians 2:6–7 (NT Epistle)
In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.	Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

It's at this point that an important hermeneutical principle comes into play: *Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative (i.e., obligatory) way—unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.*⁴ In other words, it is illegitimate—i.e., beyond the bounds of biblical authority—to turn the individual actions or behaviors that a text describes into principles or commands to be obeyed, unless we can make a really good case for it.

You might be wondering, “How can I know when a described behavior is prescribed?” The answer is: through a careful examination of a combination of factors (1) in a CUT or (2) its book that work together to prescribe the described behavior. For example, in terms of factors in a CUT, in 2 Samuel 11–12 most of chapter 11 describes David's murderous activities. At the end of the chapter we read, ‘But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD’ (11:27). From this combination of factors, it is accurate to conclude that “murder is

wrong, even for the king.” For discovering how (and how difficult it is) to discern exceptions through a combination of factors in a biblical book, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004).

When we take these three key differences between OT narratives and NT epistles together, an important point emerges: *OT narratives convey a small number of theological principles*. The number of theological principles in one or two chapters of OT narrative pale in comparison to 1 or 2 chapters of NT epistle. Furthermore, as seen in the previous paragraph, it usually takes at least half of a narrative CUT for even ancillary theological principles to be taught.

For preaching, this means that OT narratives contain very few legitimate application principles. What is application? *Application is an actionable principle, instruction, or exemplification that derives from the theology (i.e., message) of a biblical text.* Application is not a good idea that comes to our minds when we read or preach a text. Application is not a principle that we “see” illustrated in a text.⁵ It is a requirement of God that is

⁵ Try this sometime: Get two groups of ten pastors/people—from two decidedly different cultures. One group at a time, give them the same OT narrative to read and ask each individual to write down all of the “application” principles that are taught in the text. Then ask each group to vote on the legitimacy of each member’s “application.” When someone wants to “vote down” another’s application, ask the person to give the reason(s) why. Then apply that same reasoning to the critic’s “applications” to see if the critic is consistent. Finally, compare the “applications” of the two groups.

You will likely find two things: (1) in some cases, people will intuitively use sound hermeneutics to correctly invalidate another person’s “applications” only to (2) rarely use them when coming up with their own “applications.” Furthermore, it will likely become clear that the primary—albeit unconscious—measure that is used to determine the legitimacy of an “application” is personal preference. In other words, if we like it or find it useful, it’s valid.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 118–19 (emphasis theirs). See also Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 424–26.

taught in the passage at hand, or a way to carry out such a requirement. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart express it well:

Perhaps the single most useful bit of caution we can give you about reading and learning from narratives is this: Do not be a monkey-see-monkey-do reader [or preacher] of the Bible. . . . An Old Testament narrative usually *illustrates* a doctrine [or behavior] *taut* propositionally *elsewhere*. . . . Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened. . . . Therefore, not every narrative has an individual identifiable moral application [i.e., a specific behavior that it is teaching or teaching against]. . . . We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We are expected to be able to [not apply, but] judge this on the basis of what God has *tought* us directly and categorically *elsewhere* in Scripture.⁶

Objection One: Apostolic and Early Church Hermeneutics

I commonly hear two objections when I share that the theology of an OT narrative contains only a small number of application principles. The first objection cites the hermeneutics of the apostles or early church, suggesting that they had an alternate method of applying OT narratives that we can use today. Two things can be said in reply. The first, which relates to apostolic hermeneutics, is that if you are willing to dedicate three to five years of your life to sort out and learn the actual hermeneutical methods of the apostles—as opposed to some hack pseudo-version of it—go for it. Don’t be surprised, however, when you discover that much of what they did pertained not to discerning life application principles from every nook and cranny of an OT narrative, but to pointing to Christ through the OT.

The second, which relates to the early church’s hermeneutics, is that while the early church didn’t always recover the message of an OT narrative, that doesn’t mean that it wasn’t their goal to do so. That

many tried and failed doesn’t mean that we should fail intentionally.⁷ Furthermore, in many ways correct hermeneutics involves what the early church called the “four senses” of Scripture. This way of thinking about the hermeneutical process was dropped not because it was altogether invalid, but because its consistent misapplication yielded highly improbable results.⁸

Objection Two: 1 Corinthians 10:1–22

The second objection that I commonly hear is, “Doesn’t the apostle Paul teach in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22, esp. 10:6, 11, that we can moralize—i.e., *atomistically* turn the individual actions of OT narrative characters into *do* or *do not do as the biblical character did* principles or commands?” The answer is “no.” The answer is “no.” There are three ways that we can know this. The first way is by carefully reading 1 Corinthians 10:6. Paul—who in the surrounding context of 10:1–11:1 is warning the Corinthians to avoid idolatry—refers certain OT narratives that teach the futility of idolatry (i.e., trusting in anything other than God for a sense of national, family, personal, or economic security). As part of that argument he says in 1 Corinthians 10:6:

“Now these things took place as examples

lithpos: “model, pattern . . . of someth. serving as a model for understanding someth. else, usually rendered ‘type.’” More specifically, its purpose is to serve “as guidance for a style of life.”⁹

for us, [so] that we might not desire evil [i.e., *idolatrous*] things as they did.”

⁷ See John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1984), 172.

⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, s.v. “Hermeneutics,” 283–84.

⁹ This is the precise definition of this word in this text according to the authoritative work on precise NT word definitions: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. See also its pastor-friendly version, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 358.

⁶ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 105–6.

In other words, 1 Corinthians 10:6 teaches that certain OT narratives record Israel's idolatry so that future generations of people would not follow the overall “model” or “pattern” of idolatry in such narratives. Such narratives were written so that we would not be a “type” or “contemporary version” of people who in some sense align ourselves with God, but are in fact idolaters. What Paul is *not* saying is that OT narratives were written so that we would *atomistically* make application out of the individual actions of a character. So then, while it would be legitimate to say, at some point in the sermon, something like, “Let’s follow (or not follow) Israel’s overall example,” it would be illegitimate to *atomistically* turn the actions of OT narrative characters into *do or do not do as the biblical character did* principles or commands.

The second way that we can know that 1 Corinthians 10:1–22 does not teach that we can moralize is by looking at the applications that Paul makes. They are: do not participate in idolatry, particularly of a sexual variety (10:7–8); do not put God/Christ to the test (10:9); do not grumble against God’s authority as expressed through the words of his divinely appointed Old Covenant prophets and New Covenant apostles (10:10); humble yourselves before God (10:12); believe that God is faithful, enabling victory over temptation (10:13); flee idolatry (10:14); people cannot genuinely worship God while still participating in idolatrous practices (10:2); it is a bad idea to arouse God’s jealousy through participation in idolatrous practices, because God is stronger than us (10:22).¹⁰ As we’ll see, Paul is not moralizing, because he is not *atomistically* making application out of an action.

For example, Paul’s application in 1 Corinthians 10:10 is, “Do not grumble against God’s authority.” This application derives from either Numbers 14 or 16—it is unclear which. In both of these chapters, does Israel grumble against God’s authority? Yes. Is the application in 1 Corinthians 10:10 that we should not do that same action? Yes. Did Paul moralize? No.

Here’s why. As we discussed earlier and illustrated with an example from 2 Samuel 11–12, occasionally OT narratives teach that an action by a character is good or bad. This occurs when a combination of factors in a CUT or its book work together to make that point. In the case of Numbers 14, vv. 19–20 comment on Israel’s grumbling in vv. 1–3 and indicate that it was sinful. In Numbers 16, vv. 42–47 contain God’s immediate negative reaction to Israel’s grumbling in v. 41, indicating that it too was sinful. Thus Paul’s application is legitimate, because a combination of factors working together in the CUT makes that point.

Third, we can know that Paul’s applications in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22 are not the result of moralizing, because they apply the primary—“trust God alone”—theological principle of their CUTs. The next section discusses how to discern that. Before we move on, however, let’s reflect on the words of Peter Vogt:

Understanding the author’s purposes in writing a narrative helps us avoid a common error in the interpretation of narratives. Many times we approach narratives and look for a readily applicable “moral” that is relevant to our lives. But sound interpretation of the text means seeking to understand the author’s intention, not simply looking for something readily applicable. . . . Sound interpretation [also] means being content with (or, at least, accepting) the [text on its terms].¹¹

The Original-Theological Message and Take-Home Truth

In our discussion so far, we’ve defined the “message” of a biblical text and equated it with its “theology.” We’ve discussed how the message/theology of a passage often contains primary and ancillary theological principles, though OT narratives contain few ancillary theological principles. At this point, I want to introduce and define two new terms, Original-Theological Message and Take-Home Truth:

¹⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 451–62.

¹¹ Peter T. Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 51.

The Original-Theological Message (OTM) is the primary theological principle that a biblical text was designed to communicate to its original audience.¹²

The Take-Home Truth (THT) is a timeless or contemporary expression of the Original-Theological Message.¹³

The THT is the message of the sermon. It takes the time-specific language of the OTM and replaces it with timeless or contemporary equivalents.¹⁴ Therefore, we have to determine the OTM before we determine the THT. As we'll discuss in chapter 2, moving from the time-specific language of the OTM to the timeless or contemporary language of the THT requires the building of legitimate hermeneutical bridges. For 2 Samuel 11–12, the OTM and THT are:

OTM: The LORD will use repentant kings of Israel to fulfill the Davidic Covenant, but despising the Lord's word brings discipline.

THT: God uses us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.¹⁵

Since OT narratives teach few theological principles and usually only one unifies the passage, the THT is generally going to be the only

principle that we will spend time applying in the sermon. That said, when we cover 2 Samuel 11:27 in a sermon on 2 Samuel 11–12, we may want to say something like, “You see, murder is wrong. For you. Me. And the king.” To spend much more time on it, however, would disrupt the coherence, clarity, and flow of the sermon.

Since an entire CUT is necessary to communicate the THF, we will generally need to wait until after the narrative's been covered before making application. *Nevertheless, the entire sermon should be relevant in the sense that we should relate the text to real life throughout the sermon.* For example, when covering 2 Samuel 11:1–2, we might say something like:

The story opens with two pictures: One of David, the other of Israel's army. Like a vacationing CEO who demands his employees work nonstop, we find David taking a siesta. His entire army out in battle. Read with me verses 1–2.

Nevertheless, we would go beyond the bounds of biblical authority to *atomistically* apply this detail by saying something like, “When we're lazy, we risk falling into sin.” While we may “see” this principle illustrated, the passage doesn't teach it. Furthermore, like so many principles that we “see” in the Bible, careful study reveals the need for corrective lenses. In this case, David's decision to stay home, like the CEO's to vacation, wasn't sinful.¹⁶

Benefits of the OTM and THT

There are two powerful benefits of OTMs and THTs. First, they anchor the sermon to the primary message that God wanted to get across with that biblical text. It stands to reason that the primary message that God inspired a passage to teach should generally be our primary message. We could call OTMs and THTs our “authority-maximizers.”

¹² Some use the term “exegetical (big) idea.” I do not, because an exegetical (big) idea of a narrative is a plot summary—i.e., a summary of its “words,” not its “message/theology.” As such, an OT narrative's exegetical (big) idea should not be morphed into a THT.

¹³ The term comes from Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 65–84.

¹⁴ Some modifications to this method would be necessary when preaching the OT law, but that's a discussion for another reference tool!

¹⁵ See the final page of the reference tool for the hermeneutical justification for moving from the *wording* of the OTM to the THT.

¹⁶ David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 417.

Second, OTMs and THTs promote sermon coherence and unity by enabling us to check everything we want to say by them. Unless there is a really good reason, if something we want to say does not help our listeners understand, buy, or apply the THT, it should be taken out of the sermon. We could call OTMs and THTs “effectiveness-maximizers.”

I’ve had some protest: “I’m not into that ‘big idea’ stuff.” Fair enough, but as kids are often told, “You can choose your behavior, but you can’t control the consequences.” We can choose to ignore the proven principles of oral clarity—and if we have a charismatic sense about us, attendance numbers may increase—but listeners are not going to be able to follow or internalize what we’re saying, not even with bulletin notes!

Mistakes in the Application of OT Narratives

Since knowing what *not* to do can clarify what to do, this section discusses a few common ways that preachers “apply” OT narratives. To avoid redundancy, I will discuss these mistakes without re-hashing previously discussed arguments against them.

Springboarding

Springboarding occurs when we use the biblical text as “a peg on which to hang a string of [our own] ideas.”¹⁷ It’s a venerable method that’s been around for years. Back in the 1940s, Paul Warren noted that too often preachers “use” the biblical text “simply as a rallying point for [their] own ideas.”¹⁸ Many springboarders are heralded as biblical preachers, because their frequent—even verse-by-verse—references to the biblical text give the impression that they’re faithfully proclaiming and applying the text.

Biblical Model Approach

The Biblical Model Approach is a form of moralizing that turns OT narratives into “how-to” lists consisting of principles they don’t teach. This method might turn the story of Gideon and his fleece in Judges 6:36–40 into a misleading sermon on how to discern God’s will. Likewise, it might turn the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 into a message—that the Bible nowhere teaches—on overcoming adversity “God’s way.”

Illustrated Principles Approach

The Illustrated Principles Approach is a form of moralizing that “applies” the principles that preachers “see” illustrated in a biblical narrative. This approach might turn David’s decision to stay home from battle in 2 Samuel 11:1 into an anti-laziness principle. Likewise, it might turn David’s decision to look at Bathsheba bathing in 2 Samuel 11:2–5 into a warning about the need to flee temptation.

Universalizing the Plot Line

In seminary, students are taught the skill of creating exegetical (big) ideas: long, complex sentences that summarize the details of their texts. It’s a worthwhile skill to learn. There is a qualitative difference, however, between exegetical ideas of most NT epistolary texts and OT narratives. For example, the exegetical ideas of most NT epistolary texts are prescriptive statements of their theology. The exegetical ideas of OT narratives, however, are *descriptive* statements of their plot line. Without taking this difference into account, the Universalizing the Plot Line Approach confuses an OT narrative’s descriptive plot line (i.e., exegetical idea) with its message/theology. Typically, this results in a “What happened then, will happen to you” hermeneutic.

Most of what’s wrong with this approach has already been discussed in this chapter. Here, however, I want to discuss an additional problem, viz., the idea that when we face a “similar” situation to that of a character in a narrative that we can expect to get “similar” results. Here

¹⁷ Alan M. Stibbs, *Exounding God’s Word: Some Principles and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1960), 67.

¹⁸ Paul Christopher Warren, “By What Authority? Pitfalls in Pulpit Interpretation,” *Interpretation* 1 (April, 1947): 208.

is an exegetical idea (EI) and THT from a careful practitioner of this approach:

EI: When David failed to walk with God, he put his life, family, and career in jeopardy.

THT: When believers fail to walk with God, they put their lives, families, and careers in jeopardy.¹⁹

Notice the specificity of results: “they put their lives, families, and careers in jeopardy.” It’s too specific. It asserts more than 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches. (In the next chapter, we’ll discuss how to determine the OTM and THT of OT narratives and why “discipline” should be in those for 2 Samuel 11–12.) Furthermore, a study of the book of Judges demonstrates why we need to avoid such specificity. Seven times in Judges, Israel committed the same sin, *viz.*, doing “what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (2:11; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). God’s responses—*i.e.*, the results/consequences—included discipline each time, but the specifics of the discipline were unpredictably different. Commenting on this variety in Judges, Robert Chisholm writes:

[W]hile God is unchanging . . . this does not mean that he always . . . relates to people in the same way. . . . If we learn anything from the stories of the Old Testament, it is that God cannot be placed in a box where his response can be predicted. On the contrary, he is free to act as he pleases, even though his actions may seem contradictory or inconsistent with our limited perspective.²⁰

I know that you want to preach with biblical authority. I also know how vulnerable it makes us feel to admit to long-standing imperfections of such a personal nature. I know how scary it is to mess with the preaching methods that have gotten you where you are today. I get it. You have no reason to be ashamed of anything. God has worked through you, and will continue to. It took courage to get you “here.” Use that same courage to take you “there.”

¹⁹ See Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 106. Mathewson’s term for the THT is the “theological (big) idea.”

²⁰ Robert B. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 191.

Chapter 2

OT Narratives: From Text Selection to Take-Home Truth

Having provided an overview of what it takes to preach OT narratives with biblical authority, this chapter teaches the skills that make it happen. In working with pastors, I've found that these skills are not difficult to learn, but they do take a few pages to explain. To shorten the learning curve, there is a one-page worksheet at the end of the chapter that includes nearly all of the skills taught in this chapter. *Print it out and refer to it regularly as you read this chapter.* Since 2 Samuel 11–12 is used as an example throughout this chapter, it would also make sense to have it in front of you as you read.

Once you learn these skills, expect your preaching of OT narratives to be a richer experience. It may also be a more spiritual experience, because it takes real trust in God and his Word to not shoot straight for easy *mis*applications. Having been subtly convinced that anything with a biblical flavor is good enough, it takes real courage on our part to preach God's message from OT narratives.

I am confident that your listeners will appreciate the difference. There is a reason why at least 40 percent of the Bible is narrative. People desire to have a personal narrative that fits into a corporate narrative. People want to fit into something bigger than their small world. Through OT narratives, God says, "I'm redeeming the world. Trust me and you can be a meaningful part of it."

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STEPS

In Step 1: Select a Complete Unit of Thought (CUT), you'll learn how to select proper OT narrative preaching texts. To preach OT narratives with biblical authority, we almost always need to preach entire CUTs.

In Step 2: Identify the Theological and Historical Contexts, you'll learn that OT narratives are designed to teach something about God—his nature or covenant-keeping—to people who lived under a different covenant and had different felt needs. When the material in this step is ignored, our sermon's message and applications will likely veer in the wrong direction.

In Step 3: Study the Plot, you'll learn how to appreciate and grasp the intricate design of OT narratives. You'll also learn how to make effective use of scholarly commentaries and reference works so that you can preach more dynamic sermons.

In Step 4: Discover the Original-Theological Message (OTM), you'll learn how to decipher an OT narrative's primary theological principle. Since it's possible for an OTM to be accurate, precise, and unhelpful, practical advice is given for writing them well.

In Step 5: Craft the Take-Home Truth (THT), you'll learn the process of turning OTMs into THTs so that your sermons on OT narratives will proclaim and apply their timeless message in a way that listeners today can understand.

The question everyone asks me is: How long will all of this take? The answer: three to five hours. Most of that time will be in Step 3 where you'll ask good questions and get good answers.

The steps in this chapter, however, are only part of sermon preparation. I tell pastors that we need to accept that a quality 30-minute message takes at least 15 hours to prepare. In my mind, a quality sermon is no less than one that accurately proclaims and applies the message of its biblical preaching text(s) and is so easy to follow that 1 hour later, most listeners could share—even if it's in their own words—the sermon's THT or main points from memory.

Step 1

Select a Complete Unit of Thought (CUT)

Preaching OT narratives with biblical authority requires careful text selection. A poorly chosen preaching text will likely doom the sermon. In general, we need to preach an entire CUT, because OT narratives convey very few theological principles and it takes an entire CUT to convey an OTM.¹ Thus, preaching partial CUTs typically results in misapplication.

Old Testament narratives contain three clues to help us identify where their CUTs begin and end: (1) a complete plot, (2) beginning markers, and (3) end markers. Since the identification of a CUT is not an exact science, the greater the number of indicators, the more certain is our identification of a CUT.

¹ In a few cases, our preaching text can be less than an entire CUT while maintaining biblical authority. For example, even though Genesis 11:27–12:9 is a complete CUT, one section of it, viz., Genesis 12:1–3, can be legitimately preached apart from the rest of the CUT, because it is a covenantal declaration. Furthermore, for practical reasons, we may want to preach this CUT without referencing the genealogy in 11:27–29. If we did, we would still need to incorporate into the sermon any theological contribution that the genealogy makes to the CUT's OTM, even if the genealogy was never mentioned in the sermon.

A Complete Plot

Biblical narratives usually contain four plot stages: introduction, problem, solution, and conclusion.² The introduction stage provides the story's setting. The problem stage begins with the narrative's major plot conflict and ends when the conflict reaches its highest intensity. The solution stage begins the moment a character appears or an action occurs that will eventually resolve the conflict and ends when it's fully resolved. The conclusion stage provides the outcome and finishes the story.

In 2 Samuel 11–12, 11:1 serves as the introduction, alerting us to the story's main character, location, and time of year. The problem stage begins at 11:2 and reaches its peak at 11:27. If the narrative ended at 11:27, readers would be left disappointed and appalled that David got away with murder. The solution stage begins at 12:1 when God intervenes, unexpectedly sending Nathan the prophet. The solution stage ends at 12:23 when David and Bathsheba's child dies. The conclusion covers 12:24–31, which details the birth of Solomon and Israel's success in battle.

Beginning and End Markers

Old Testament narratives often provide objective beginning and end markers to help readers identify CUTs. These markers are helpful, because our sense of where a complete plot begins and ends is quite subjective. Beginning and end markers are quite useful, therefore, for confirming or correcting our initial sense of where a CUT begins and ends.

² Over time, you may want to learn the more detailed approach that is presented in Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie, 1987), 92. You can learn this approach by preparing sermons from Genesis with the help of Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 2007).

The most common beginning markers are:

1. Introductions to new main characters.
 - 2 Samuel 11:1, “Now Absalom, David’s son, had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar. After that time, Amnon, David’s son, loved her.”
2. Introductions to a change of time.
 - 2 Samuel 11:1, “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle.”
3. Introductions to a change in place.
 - 2 Samuel 1:1, “After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.”
4. Phrases that a book frequently uses to begin a narrative.
 - In 2 Samuel, “After this” opens five CUTs.

The most common end markers are:

1. Concluding statements.
 - 2 Samuel 12:31, “Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.”
2. Concluding summaries.
 - 2 Samuel 9:11b–13, “So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba’s house became Mephibosheth’s servants. So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king’s table. Now he was lame in both his feet.”

We need to also look at the beginning and end markers of the surrounding narratives. For example, when a CUT does not have a

clear beginning marker, we can still know where it begins by noticing the clear end marker in the previous narrative.

Step 2

Identify the Theological and Historical Contexts

Once a CUT has been identified, the search for its OTM begins. What you’ll see in this section is that OT narratives are designed to teach something about God—his nature or covenant-keeping. Therefore, our goal in Steps 2 through 4 is to answer the following question:

What question is this CUT designed to answer about God—his nature or covenant-keeping—to ancient Israel?

THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Old Testament narratives are designed to teach something about God—his nature or covenant-keeping. This is true of narratives that never mention God, such as 2 Samuel 13 or the book of Esther. Andrew Hill and John Walton write, “Think of [OT narratives] as theological. . . . Remember the main focus is on God and his covenant, not people or events.”³ They add:

The purpose of the historical literature . . . is to show the ways in which the Lord has acted in history to fulfill his covenant promises and to carry out his agenda. [It’s] didactic (giving instruction) in the sense that it is revelation of who God is by recording what he has done. . . . Some readers are inclined to look for new insights and lessons in each account. But rather [look for] patterns, themes, and motifs [about God] that we ought to see as weaving [a tapestry] . . . a picture of the sovereign God of the covenant . . . The significance of

³ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 211.

each thread [i.e., the OTM] is the contribution it makes to the tapestry. The narratives must be approached through their context, and God must be seen as the focus.”⁴

Peter Vogt writes:

We must also keep in mind that biblical narratives usually have a theological⁵ purpose. That is, the authors were less interested in conveying details about the lives of even biblical “heroes” than in communicating something about God and his interaction with his people. In Genesis 39, the emphasis is not on Joseph per se but on God’s faithfulness in being with Joseph . . . *in order to accomplish his purposes in the lives of the descendants of Abraham.*⁶

The God-centered focus of OT narratives does not mean that they are not intended to influence human behavior. On the contrary, they are written to affectively teach something about God—his nature or covenant-keeping—so that people will trust him in every area of life. In other words, OT narratives are about God, but they are intended to transform us. Yair Amit puts it this way:

It seems reasonable to assume that the authors of biblical narratives believed that if they told their flock about God’s mighty deeds—how God saved the people in times of distress, how their fate was in God’s hands, and how it paid to obey God—then the community of worshipers would keep its side of the covenant and remain faithful to God.⁷

⁴ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 211.

⁵ By theological, Vogt means “God-centered.” Scholars often use the terms “theological” and “ethical” (human behavior) to help them say that the messages/theology of OT narratives are primarily about God and that they rarely endorse specific human behaviors.

⁶ Peter T. Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 51.

⁷ Yair Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 2.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Old Testament narratives teach something about God—his nature or covenant-keeping—but they do so within an Old Covenant context. In order to preach them well, we need to read them in light of (1) ancient Israel’s view of the retribution principle and afterlife, (2) their latest Old Covenant expansion, and (3) their original audience.

Ancient Israel’s View of the Retribution Principle and Afterlife
The Old Covenant operates on the basis of the retribution principle. The retribution principle teaches that God will bless those who follow him and curse those who do not. It is found in Genesis 12:1–3 and is expressed in different ways throughout the OT (e.g., Deuteronomy 28 and applied in different ways throughout the prophets).

The retribution principle sounds straightforward enough until we realize that Israel expected it to be carried out in this life. This is because Israel had no concept of *reward* or *punishment* in the afterlife until the book of Daniel, one of the latest books in the OT.⁸

Israel’s view of the retribution principle and afterlife explains many things about the OT: why Job’s friends stubbornly insisted on his guilt; why the psalmists expressed thoroughgoing distress and expected that God would rescue them in the here and now; why Proverbs is so optimistic; and why Ecclesiastes is, in part, a corrective to Proverbs’ optimism. For preaching OT narratives, we need to be aware that

⁸ Harry Buis, *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Moïses Silva and Merrill C. Tenney, rev. ed., s.v. “Retribution.” See also John H. Walton, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, s.v. “Retribution.” Even if you’re not a “post-triibber,” read Hélène Dallaire, “Judaism and the World to Come,” in *A Care for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind” Eschatology*, ed. Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 37–60.

Israel's military victories are a sign of God's blessing resulting from the king's or Israel's obedience (and vice versa).⁹

Israel's insistence that God carry out the retribution principle in this life was neither a selfish, prideful, nor immature demand—as it might be today. Since Israel was unaware of reward or punishment in the afterlife, God's honor was at stake if he didn't act now, because he would appear to be as fickle as the gods of the surrounding nations.

Latest Old Covenant Expansion

The Old Covenant is the foundation of the OT. Succinctly expressed in Genesis 12:1–3, the scope of the Old Covenant expanded to include the Promised Land (Genesis 15), circumcision (Genesis 17), the Law (Exodus 19:5–6; 20–23; Deuteronomy), and the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:8–16; 1 Kings 2:1–4; 6:12–13; 9:4–9; 11:11–13, 32–39).

One way to tell if an OT narrative is about God's nature or God's covenant-keeping is to notice whether it references or fulfills any part of the CUT's latest Old Covenant expansion. We can know, for example, that 2 Samuel 11–12 pertains to God's covenant-keeping, because Solomon's birth fulfills the next step of the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:8–16), that narrative's latest Old Covenant expansion.

Original Audience

Biblical narratives were not written for those in them. Neither were they written *directly* to us. They were written to address the situation of their original audiences. Interpretations that ignore the historical situation of the original audience are likely to be incorrect. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard state, “Any appraisal of ‘meaning,’ then, must take into consideration this complex coalition of text, author, and audience. . . . Knowing all the conditions that surround the recipients

of the original message provides further insight into how they most likely understood the message.”¹⁰ Haddon Robinson puts it this way: “I cannot make [a] passage mean something that it did not mean in principle in the ancient world. . . . I have to be honest with the text before I can come over to the contemporary world.”¹¹

Reading OT narratives with the original audience in mind helps us avoid reinterpreting their messages to reflect our agenda (*eisegesis*). For example, realizing that Israel already had a moral code, the Law, should help us realize that OT narratives were probably not designed to be handbooks of moral principles.

Old Testament narratives were originally composed for one of three audiences: Israel preparing to do battle for the Promised Land, Israel in the Promised Land, or Israel under foreign oppression. Books with original composition dates before 1,200 B.C. were written to Israel preparing to do battle for the Promised Land; those with dates between 1,200 and 586 B.C. were written to Israel in the Promised Land; those with dates after 586 B.C. were written to Israel under foreign oppression.

Israel preparing to enter the Promised Land needed assurance that their one God would do what they'd been told he'd do, *viz.*, give them victory over the numerous gods and armies that occupied the Promised Land. In their world, the idea of trusting in one God was crazy. They needed assurance that their God would do what he said he would do.¹²

¹⁰ William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 2004), 9–11.

¹¹ Haddon Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 308.

¹² For a fascinating survey of why idolatry was—and is—so tempting, see “The Attractions of Idolatry” in Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 450–54.

⁹ For further explanation, see John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill, *Old Testament Today: A Journey from Original Meaning to Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 292–93; 307–12; 316–18; 347–48; 364–70.

Israel in the Promised Land needed to know how to survive and, preferably, thrive as a nation in the Promised Land. These weren't dumb people. In 1–2 Samuel, we discover that they were realists. They believed that God is great, but also considered a king necessary for their security (1 Samuel 8:19–20). Apparently, their two biggest enemies thought the same way. In Daniel 3:16, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, asked Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”¹³ In Isaiah 36:18–20, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, told Israel to

beware lest [your King] Hezekiah mislead you by saying, “The LORD will deliver us.” Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?

Israel under foreign oppression needed to know: What is God doing? How sovereign is God? Why should we trust God?

While a good portion of what's discovered will not make it into the sermon, it will all benefit your sermon. It will infuse you with enthusiasm, empower you to recreate the text's dynamics, and help you develop an effective sermon structure. Bo Mathews understood this. Not one to produce “information dumping” sermons, he was once asked, “Why do you spend as much time and strength [in sermon preparation] as you do?” He replied, “That half hour on Sunday morning represents the one time that I have the most exposure to my people. I think it warrants every piece of energy I give it. . . . I think people need it and deserve it.”¹⁴

As you work through this step, keep asking:

What question is this CUT designed to answer about God—his nature or covenant-keeping—to ancient Israel?

Before we go further, be aware that sooner or later you will find yourself doing Steps 3 and 4 simultaneously.

WRITE SCENE SUMMARIES

Old Testament narratives usually cover one to two chapters, so begin your study of plot by typing out brief summaries of each scene. This is sermon preparation, not a research paper. Don't worry about misidentifying where a scene begins and ends. For now, only strive to make your scene summaries clear enough to remind you of the narrative's plot.

Guaranteed, our initial drafts will have mistakes. That's okay. We're ten minutes into sermon preparation! Here are sample scene summaries for 2 Samuel 11–12:

¹³ What question do you think this narrative is designed to answer? See also Daniel 3:28–29.

¹⁴ Haddon W. Robinson, ed., *Biblical Sermons: How Twelve Preachers Apply the Principles of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 130.

(11:1) When kings go off to war, David stays behind, sends Joab and all army out to fight. They besiege Rabbah.

(11:2–5) At palace, David sees Bathsheba, has messengers get her. He sleeps with her and she gets pregnant.

(11:6–25) David calls for Uriah. When he comes, David twice tries to get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba. When Uriah doesn't, David tells Joab to put Uriah at the battlefield to die. Joab does and Uriah dies.

(11:26–27) Bathsheba mourns; David marries her.

(12:1–14) God sends Nathan to David. Via Nathan, God “sets up” David with a parable. David incriminates himself. David is told he's the parable's guilty person. Since God gave everything to David and David despised God's word, David will get disciplined. David repents, and God forgives him, but David's pre-born child will die.

(12:15–23) David fasts and pleads with God to save child. On the seventh day, the child dies. Servants don't want to tell David the child died, but David picks up on their behavior and so discovers the child's dead. David, then, worships God and begins eating again, confusing his servants.

(12:24–25) David comforts Bathsheba; she conceives; Solomon is born; the LORD loves Solomon.

(12:26–31) Joab captures the royal citadel. David is called and goes to battle. Rabbah is captured, plundered, and David and Israel return home.

Scene summaries have two benefits. First, they help us to quickly see how an insight that we discover when studying one scene fits into the narrative as a whole. Second, scene summaries—in their revised form—can morph into our sermon's “movements.” Movements are like main points in that they (1) give our sermon shape, (2) encapsulate the texts they refer to, and (3) are best spoken immediately prior to

reading the texts they encapsulate. I call them “movements” instead of “main points,” because they are descriptive (often multi-sentence) summaries. Main points—as I define them—are single, application-oriented sentences. Notice the difference:

Movement: As the story opens, we find David in his palace and David's entire army in battle.

Read with me, [2 Samuel 11] verse 1 ...

Main Point: What I want us to see is that God blesses those who consistently follow him. [restate]

Read with me [Psalm 1] verses 1 & 2 ...

IDENTIFY MAIN CHARACTERS

Identifying main characters is important, because it clues us in to who the biblical author considers to be the story's major players. In OT narratives, we can tell who they are by counting proper names (e.g., LORD, David, Bathsheba, Uriah). The key is to count only the number of times a character's proper name appears, even if it's used to refer to someone else (“Uriah's wife” counts toward Uriah, not Bathsheba). Furthermore, don't count titles (e.g., king, husband, wife), pronouns (e.g., he, she, him, her, they), or gender references (woman, man). Keep in mind that both individuals and groups that act in unison are single characters. In Judges 18, for example, the proper name “Dan” refers to the Israelite tribe of Dan. Since the tribe of Dan acts in unison—even if represented occasionally by five leaders—and its proper name appears thirteen times, it is both a single character and a main character.

In 2 Samuel 11–12, one way that we can tell that its plot has little to do with adultery is by noticing that Bathsheba is a minor character, being named only twice. David, however, is named forty-one times, Uriah twenty-three, the LORD fourteen, and Joab thirteen. In Judges 18, a character is identified thirteen times, eleven as “priest,” twice as

“Levite,” but never by his proper name. If the narrative’s main characters, Dan and Micah, are named twelve or thirteen times, shouldn’t the priest/Levite be considered a main character? The answer is no. Refusing to identify the priest/Levite by name is the biblical author’s way of letting us know that he is more like an object that is fought over than a person.

In OT narrative, God is always a main character, even when he is absent, because he is the controlling player. In fact, the longer he is absent from a narrative CUT or book, the more we should inquire into what he’s up to. In 2 Samuel 13, does God’s absence indicate that he is not a main character or that the narrative is not about him? Nope. The story’s events are, in fact, a direct result of the discipline that God announced via Nathan in the previous story.

Here’s an easy way to count proper names: When you read through a CUT early in sermon preparation, write down a proper name the first time you notice it. Then, pull up your CUT using the “Passage Lookup” feature of www.biblegateway.com. When the passage is displayed, uncheck the “Headings” box where it says “Page Options” to remove headers that might have a character’s name in it. Then, using your browser’s “find” option, one at a time enter each proper name. Often the browser will tell you how many times the name was found, but if not just count the highlighted words. Will this always give you the exact number of times that a proper name appears in the Hebrew text of that CUT? No, but the exact number isn’t necessary.

narrative dwells on is important for discerning what’s most important in a narrative’s plot and theology (see Step 4 for its usefulness to theology).

Using the one-page worksheet, break the CUT into its major scenes. Don’t stress over hyper-precision; even scholars sometimes slightly disagree on scene divisions. For each scene, (1) note how many verses the scene occupies, (2) estimate how long the events in the scene took in real life, and (3) estimate what percentage of the scene is dialogue. The results from 2 Samuel 11–12 will look like this:

Find Out What the Narrative Dwells On (2 Samuel 11–12)					
Major Scenes	# of vv.	Real Time (est.)	Dialogue (est.)	Scene Description	Scene
11:1–5	5	60 days	13%	Intro, David’s adultery, pregnancy	
11:6–25	20	30 days	50%	David’s murder of Uriah	
11:26–27	2	210 days	0%	Bathsheba’s mourning, remarriage, birth	
12:1–14	14	1 hour	90%	God’s rebuke of David via Nathan	
12:15–23	9	7 days	40%	God’s discipline via child’s death	
12:24–25	2	270 days	0%	Birth of Solomon	
12:26–31	6	60 days	20%	Military victory	

The plot’s most important scenes are those (1) with the highest concentration of dialogue, (2) that are the longest, and (3) with the highest ratio of narrated time to real time—i.e., the most amount of verses per day that the scene took to occur in real life.

In 2 Samuel 11–12, it may surprise us to learn that God’s rebuke of David via Nathan in 12:1–14 is the most important scene. We can know this because it has the highest concentration of dialogue, the highest ratio of narrated time to real time (fourteen verses for one hour!), and is the second-longest scene. We discover that David’s murder of Uriah in 11:6–26—which exemplifies God’s charges against David in 12:7–14—is the second most important scene, because it is the longest, has the second highest concentration of dialogue, and has the second highest ratio of real time to narrated time.

FIND OUT WHAT THE NARRATIVE DWELLS ON

Old Testament narratives are famous for their economy of words. We may find them long (some take ten minutes to read), but all things considered, they are brief. Every word is carefully chosen. Every scene is intentionally proportioned. Discovering what the

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS AND GET GOOD ANSWERS

One of the most misunderstood concepts of sermon preparation is the idea of “doing our own work.” The problem isn’t with the idea, but our understanding of it. Too often we take it to mean that we should study the text on our own and not “depend” on commentaries. That sounds so noble until we realize that this misunderstanding is the surest way for most of us to preach our thoughts as if they were God’s.

The concept of “doing your own work” really means this: “Do the work that you are qualified to do, but verify and supplement it with quality reference works.” Notice that there is no “then” in the preceding sentence. There is nothing—including the Bible—that says that we don’t need to or shouldn’t use commentaries and other reference works throughout sermon preparation.

There is no shame in being honest about our true abilities. As Paul says, “I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment” (Romans 12:3). Failure is not making frequent use of competent reference works. It’s misrepresenting our Wholly Other God and his Word when we didn’t have to. We should never underestimate our ability to misrepresent God on the pulpit (see James 3:1–5).

The other mistake that we make is to prepare sermons with the help of others who are no more qualified than we are. Since preaching today—whether verse-by-verse or topical, seeker-friendly or seeker-unfriendly, fundamentalist or emergent—is largely our thoughts with biblical flavoring added, many of us look to creative and successful preachers to help us effectively “use” God’s Word. If God “blessed” their “use” of Scripture, it has to be good enough, right?

There is a humble and happy medium: Ask lots of good questions throughout the CUT—even when you think you know the answers—and get good answers from

people who are specialists in their fields. A key phrase here is “even when you think you know the answers.” I’ve trained enough pastors to know that we are way too quick to assume that our interpretations are accurate. Are specialists always right? Of course not, but they know a lot more about our preaching texts than we do.

I find it interesting that when pastors start taking a question-based approach to commentary work, they learn to enjoy using scholarly commentaries. One day, I shared this with my wife Sara, who has an M.S. in Reading. She replied, “That makes perfect sense. Reading non-fiction is much more enjoyable when you have a purpose for reading it. Going to technical commentaries with only the vaguest hope of getting something out of them would disillusion anyone. By going to commentaries to get *their* questions answered, pastors find meaning and purpose in it. Some probably even think it’s fun.”

As you ask questions, feel free to draw your own *provisional* conclusions, but verify their accuracy. Get excited when you find out your provisional conclusions are wrong! And guess what? For a (potentially long) while you may find that your provisional conclusions are frequently wrong. That’s okay. We’re preachers. We’re not paid to know everything about a passage the first time we read it. We’re paid to get it right when we preach it.

What questions should we be asking of OT narratives? Any question that helps us understand their background, design, or intent. Here’s a list of question types:

1. What’s going on in this section of the book?
2. Who is/are ...? What is the reader expected to know about them?
3. What does ... mean in this context?
4. Why is (a) this detail included (b) at this point?
5. What purpose does ... serve in the narrative?

6. Why did the character say or do ...? Was this expected/acceptable behavior at that time?
7. What might the original audience's visceral reaction be to this?
8. If this means ... , how does it fit with [another part of the CUT, book, or Bible]?

On a sheet of paper or in a computer document, create two columns, one for verse references and the other for questions. Below is a list of questions from 2 Samuel 11:1–3. Since this list is for you, make it work for you. Don't worry about writing them out as grammatically correct sentences. Feel free to not list subquestions as I do below, if the main question will remind you of them. Furthermore, add questions based on what's discussed in Steps 1, 2, and 4 as well.

Asking Good Questions of 2 Samuel 11:1–3

W.	Question
1	When is the “spring of the year”?
1	What does it mean that it's the time of year that “kings go out to battle?”
	Does every king in the area go out to battle?
	Is this just another way of saying that the spring is “battle season?”
	Do the actual kings go to battle or is the king still considered as having gone to battle if his army went, but he didn't?
	Why would the narrator have to mention that “the spring of the year” is “the time when kings go out to battle”? Wouldn't the original audience already know that?
1	What does “all Israel” mean?
	Is it correct to say that it doesn't include women and children?
	Is it another way of saying, “nearly all able-bodied men”?
1	Who are the Ammonites?
1	What is Israel's past history with them?
1	Where is Rabbah?
1	Is Rabbah an Ammonite town?
1	What am I expected to get out of the fact that “David remained at Jerusalem?”
2	Does “arose” mean that David was sleeping in the afternoon?

This skill requires patience. Like the skill of listening effectively to our kids, we must put other things out of our minds, give our full attention to it, and accept that it will take longer than we want to give it. Expect to dedicate thirty to sixty minutes to simply asking questions of the CUT.

Selecting Reference Works
We are the reference works we use. No matter the dress of our sermon—e.g., verse-by-verse or topical, seeker-friendly or seeker-unfriendly, Bible-thumping or emergent—the reference works we use affect the accuracy and quality of our sermons. What follows are my minimum recommendations.

Begin by spending \$12 to purchase the latest edition of Tremper Longman's *Old Testament Commentary Survey* and prepare sermons with at least five of his top picks. This many commentaries is necessary, because 50 percent or more of the commentaries will not address many

of our questions.¹⁵ Unless there is a compelling reason, if Longman doesn't mention a commentary or rates it poorly, don't use it.¹⁶

Additionally, I recommend having the following reference works (or later editions of them) handy throughout sermon preparation.

- The following OT survey:
Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed.
- The following OT introduction:
Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed.
- Two or more of the following dictionaries/encyclopedias:
Merrill C. Tenney and Moisés Silva, eds., *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, rev. ed.
Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed.
David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

If preaching from Genesis to Deuteronomy:

Desmond T. Alexander and David W. Baker, eds.,
Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch.

¹⁵ To enhance efficiency, have an assistant or volunteer photocopy and staple together the relevant pages of each reference work so that you don't have to fumble through these bulky tomes. To make it easy to identify which reference work is which during sermon prep, have your assistant or a volunteer photocopy and staple a work's title page to the back of its set of pages.

¹⁶ One compelling reason would be if a major commentary series—one whose volumes Longman typically recommends—brings out a new volume after Longman's latest edition was published. Likewise, every once in a while a high quality “semi-commentary” also proves immensely helpful, such as Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*.

If preaching from the historical books:

Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, eds.,
Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings.

• The following one-volume Bible commentary:

D. A. Carson, ed., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*.

Get these reference works, but remember: Use them primarily to get answers to *your* many good questions.

Step 4

Determine the Wording of the Original-Theological Message

We now turn to skills for discerning the *wording* of an OT narrative's OTM. As we discussed in Step 2, arriving at the OTM requires us to ask and answer the following question:

What question is this CUT designed to answer about God—his nature or covenant-keeping—to ancient Israel?

This is because OT narratives are designed to communicate something about God—his nature or covenant-keeping. Therefore, in terms of subject and complement,¹⁷ the grammatical subject of OT narratives will be “God” or “the LORD.” Best written as questions, fuller expressions of their subjects will pertain to God’s nature or God’s covenant-keeping. The subject of 2 Samuel 11–12 is, “What kind of sinful king of Israel will God use to fulfill the Davidic Covenant?” The answer to that question is called the complement.

¹⁷ See Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Message*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 41.

To determine the *wording* of an OT narrative's OTM, we must engage in theological analysis of (1) structural commentary, (2) characters, and (3) each scene. When studying each of these, the key question to continually ask is:

What is the theological or functional purpose of this aspect of the narrative?

For the aims of this Step, an aspect of a narrative has theological purpose when it makes a contribution to the *wording* of the OTM. It is functional when it helps tell the story well, exemplifies a part of the OTM, or makes an ancillary theological contribution. For example, 2 Samuel 11:27—working together 11:2–26—makes an ancillary theological contribution to the CUT, but is considered functional in this Step, because it only makes an ancillary theological contribution. How to discern these things will become clearer in the pages ahead.

I don't want to make it seem, however, like there is an impenetrable wall between the theological and the functional. Anything that contributes to the *wording* of an OTM also performs a functional role. For example, God's confrontation of David via Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:7–14 makes a significant contribution to the *wording* of the OTM and the plot—it's a dramatic confrontation! Likewise, David's murder of Uriah in 11:6–25 makes a significant functional contribution, but it also supports and exemplifies much of the OTM.

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURAL COMMENTARY

The first thing to analyze to determine the *wording* of an OT narrative's OTM is its structural commentary. Structural commentary includes (1) genre, (2) previous CUTs, (3) comments by the narrator, and (4) repeated words or phrases. Genre was discussed in Step 2 and is what informs us that the OTM pertains to God's nature or God's covenant-keeping. The focus here, therefore, will be on the latter three.

Previous CUTs

Periodically, CUTs of OT narrative are designed to be read with one or more previous CUTs at the *forefront* of our minds. This is because their plots unfold similarly or address similar theological issues. For example, we know that Abraham's and Isaac's “my sister” narratives in Genesis 12:10–20, 20:1–18, and 26:1–25 are designed to be read in light of each other, because their plots unfold very similarly. We know that 2 Samuel 11–12 is designed to be read in light of 1 Samuel 13, 15, where God rejects King Saul for seemingly lesser offenses, because they both deal with God's (un)willingness to use sinful kings of Israel.

Perceiving when a CUT should be explicitly read in light of another can help us determine the specific question about God's nature or God's covenant-keeping that the CUT answers. Knowing, for example, that 2 Samuel 11–12 should be read in light of 1 Samuel 13, 15, helps us realize that its OTM will answer a question about the kind of king of Israel that God will use (or not use) to fulfill his purposes, *viz.*, the David Covenant (2 Samuel 7:8–16)—the latest Old Covenant expansion.

To pick up on the significance of previous CUTs, it's usually necessary to check with scholarly commentaries, particularly those that focus on literary and theological matters. It was David Firth's commentary, for example, that alerted me to the connection between 2 Samuel 11–12 and 1 Samuel 13, 15.¹⁸

Comments by the Narrator

In biblical narratives, the narrator is the person telling the story. With rare exceptions, narrators stand above the action, relating events from God's omniscient perspective. Biblical narrators tend to refrain from making explicit comments, preferring to allow characters and events to speak for themselves. In 2 Samuel 13, for example, the narrator doesn't

¹⁸ David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 430–31.

feel the need to comment on the sinfulness of Amnon's rape of Tamar. The audience is expected to be horrified by it.

When narrators do comment, however, it's usually to explain or evaluate something important.¹⁹ The comment in 2 Samuel 11:4, for example, is a parenthetical explanation: “Now [Bathsheba] had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.” The comment in 2 Samuel 11:27 is evaluative: “But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.”

What is the theological or functional purpose of this aspect of the narrative?

Comment by the Narrator	Theological or Functional Purpose
“Now [Bathsheba] had been purifying herself from her uncleanness” (2 Samuel 11:4).	FUNCTIONAL. With this comment, the narrator is making a crucial point: Bathsheba wasn't pregnant when David lay with her. ²⁰
“But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Samuel 11:27).	FUNCTIONAL. ²¹ After allowing the original audience to ponder a while on whether the king—unlike them—can use “legal” means to murder someone, the answer of this comment is “no.” ²² This comment also informs readers that God saw what happened, that he is displeased, and that they can expect him to intervene.

Repeated Words or Phrases

In individual OT narratives or a series of them, there are often certain words that appear with far greater frequency than they do in the rest of the book. In 2 Samuel 10–12, for example, *šlh* (to send) appears twenty-three times.

Most scholarly commentaries will alert us to repeated words or phrases. Be aware, however, that they tend to refer to repeated words as *leitwort*, or “key words,” and repeated phrases as *leitmotiv*.

Once we've discovered any *leitwort* or *leitmotiv*, it's time to ask, “What is the theological or functional purpose of this aspect of the narrative?” Often they perform a functional purpose, one that heightens interest in the story. When they are included in dialogue, especially dialogue with a theological purpose (see later in this Step), there is an increased chance that they will contribute to the *wording* of the OTM.

What is the theological or functional purpose of this aspect of the narrative?	
Repeated Words (<i>leitwort</i>) or Phrases (<i>leitmotiv</i>)	Theological or Functional Purpose
<i>šlh</i> (to send)	FUNCTIONAL: The repeated use of this word helps readers feel the authority and power of the “senders”—human and divine—to declare and actualize what they are sending.
<i>mwt</i> (to die)	FUNCTIONAL: The repeated use of this word helps readers feel for the powerless, whose “ever-present fate” is in the hands of the senders. ²³

¹⁹ Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 31.

²⁰ Ronald F. Youngblood, “2 Samuel,” in *1 Samuel–2 Kings*, rev. ed., vol. 3, Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 431.

²¹ While this comment by the narrator makes an ancillary theological contribution to the CUT's message/theology (see “Hermeneutics 201” in chapter 1), the verse is considered “functional” here, because it doesn't make a contribution to the OTM, which is concerned with the primary theological principle that a CUT was designed to communicate to its original audience.

²² Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 14.

²³ Youngblood, “2 Samuel,” 432.

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS

The second skill for determining the *wording* of an OT narrative's OTM involves figuring out which characters are theologically representative and what they represent. While OT narratives are full of characters, only one to three of them make a contribution to the *wording* of the OTM. Of the ten-plus characters in 2 Samuel 11–12, for example, only the Lord and David are theologically representative.

Since God is a main character in every OT narrative, even when he is absent, and since OT narratives are about him, God is theologically representative in every narrative. And, as you would expect, God is representative of himself. In other words, “God” or “the LORD” will appear in the OTM—as the grammatical subject—for every OT narrative CUT.

Theologically representative human characters, however, do not represent themselves in the OTM. In 2 Samuel 11–12, for example, David is not representative of himself, but of “kings of Israel.” In Genesis 22:1–19, Isaac is representative of Israel. In Daniel 3, Babylon’s king Nebuchadnezzar represents nations or world powers that set themselves up against God’s rule or persecute those who trust in God.

Keep in mind, a character (e.g., Abraham) may be theologically representative in one narrative, but not in another. In Genesis 11:27–12:9, for example, Abraham is theologically representative of Israel. In Genesis 22:1–19, Abraham is not theologically representative.²⁴ Furthermore, what a character represents in one narrative may not be what he represents in another narrative.

As we'll see in Step 5, it's crucial to put in the OTM what a character represents theologically, not the character's name. Those who treat OT narrative exegetical ideas as if they were OTMs frequently run afoul here. Like it did with Mathewson, using “David” instead of “kings of Israel,” for example, may lead us to mistakenly think that “David” can be replaced in the THT with “husband,” “father,” “leader,” “believer,” or “person.”²⁵ As we'll see in Step 5, while it is legitimate—in 2 Samuel 11–12, at least—to equate “kings of Israel” and “believers,” these other “equivalents” are suspect, especially “person.”

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF EACH SCENE

The final skill for determining the *wording* of an OT narrative's OTM involves going through each scene—in their order of importance (see Step 3)—to discern their contribution to the *wording* of the OTM. To do this, we look at each scene's dialogue and actions and ask, “What is the theological or functional purpose of this aspect of the narrative?” This is not that difficult. When I teach this material to folks with no biblical training, I am no longer surprised when they come very close to discerning an OT narrative's OTM their first time around. The key is to remember to discover what each scene—in conjunction with the entire narrative—is trying to teach about God's nature or God's covenant-keeping.

²⁴ Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narratives*, 86, 210. Making the same point for Gospel narratives, Ernest Best writes that most of the material about Bible characters “has been recorded for a purpose other than that of giving us information about the particular person. . . . It is foolish of us therefore to use these incidents to build up a picture of the character of Peter and then go on and apply it to men generally.” Ernest Best, *From Text to Sermon: Responsible Use of the New Testament in Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1978), 90–91.

²⁵ See Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 143–44; 200–1. See also *Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 179–81.

Analyze the Dialogue

Going scene-by-scene in the order of their importance, analyze each scene's dialogue first, if it has any. This is because dialogue frequently makes a major contribution to an OT narrative's OTM.²⁶ Furthermore, if God speaks in a scene, look first at what he says. As the table below illustrates, it is important to recognize that God speaks in a variety of ways.

Who Speaks	Examples
God, directly	Genesis 12:1–3 (to Abraham) Genesis 22:15–18 (to Abraham)
God, through a dream	Genesis 28:13–15 (to Jacob)
God, through an intermediary	Genesis 37:6–7 (to Joseph) Genesis 19:12–17 (through angels)
God, through reliable human character	2 Samuel 12:7–14 (through prophet) Genesis 50:20 (through Joseph)

It can be helpful to print out a computer document with God's speech in red and everyone else's speech in blue. Notice below that Nathan's words in 2 Samuel 12:1–4 are blue, but his words in 12:7–14 are red, because in 12:7–14 he is speaking authoritatively for God.

What is the theological or functional purpose of this aspect of the narrative?

Scene (2 Samuel 12:1–14)	Theological or Functional Purpose
And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds, ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and leading up to God's	FUNCTIONAL: The dialogue in vv. 1–6 is designed to heighten interest in the story by getting David to incriminate himself and leading up to God's

drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.” ⁵Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, ⁶and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

⁷Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. ⁸And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife. ¹⁰Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ ¹¹Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹²For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’” ¹³David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.”

THEOLOGICAL: In vv. 7–8, the LORD addresses David as King of Israel. In v. 9, the king is accused of despising the LORD's Word. In v. 11, the king is punished/disciplined. In v. 13, the king sincerely repents. In v. 13, God forgives the sincerely repentant king, and thus does not reject him. In v. 14, discipline remains.

Based on 2 Samuel 11–12's most important scene, 12:1–14, above is an example of how theological analysis of scenes works. Verses 1–14, therefore, make the following contribution to the CUT's OTM:

²⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 209; Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, 56–57; Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 60–61.

The LORD will forgive/not reject kings of Israel if they sincerely repent of despising the LORD's word, but God's discipline remains.

Analyze the Action

Once a scene's dialogue has been analyzed, it's time to analyze its action. If God acts in a scene, look first at his actions. It is important to recognize that God acts through a variety of means:

Who Acts	Examples
God, directly	Genesis 1:1 (creation) Genesis 11:5–9 (language confusion)
God, through biology	2 Samuel 12:15–18 (child's death) 2 Samuel 12:24–25 (Solomon's birth)
God, through an intermediary	Genesis 32:24–25 (Jacob's wrestling) Daniel 3:24–25 (rescue from furnace)
God, through human characters	Joshua 7:2–5 (military defeat) 2 Samuel 12:26–31 (military victory)

Furthermore, we must be familiar with the discussion in Step 2 pertaining to the retribution principle and a CUT's latest Old Covenant expansion, so that we can discern all of God's actions. Below is an analysis of the actions in 2 Samuel 12:24–25:

What is the theological or functional purpose of this aspect of the narrative?

Scene (2 Samuel 12:24–25)	Theological or Functional Purpose
²⁸ Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the LORD loved him ²⁵ and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.	THEOLOGICAL: Since the birth of Solomon is a fulfillment of the next step of the Davidic Covenant and is further proof that God will use repentant kings of Israel, "fulfill the Davidic Covenant" needs to be added to the OTM.

Once we've gone through each scene, our notes should look similar to the following:

What is the theological or functional purpose of this aspect of the narrative?		
Scene (w.)	Theological (T) or Functional (F) Purpose	
11:1–5	(F) These verses serve to exemplify what God calls despising him/his word in 12:9–10.	
11:6–25	(F) These verses further exemplify what God calls despising him/his word in 12:9–10.	
11:26–27	(F) These verses further exemplify what God calls despising him/his word in 12:9–10. The narrator's comment in v. 27b informs the original audience that God is aware of what happened and is displeased.	
12:1–14	(F) 12:1–6 adds drama to the narrative by getting King David to incriminate himself.	
	(T) 12:7–14 indicates that God will forgive/not reject the Kings of Israel—represented by David—if they sincerely repent of despising the Lord's word, but they won't escape God's discipline (12:7–14).	
12:15–23	(F) 12:15–23 functions to exemplify God's discipline as stated in 12:14.	
12:24–25	(T) In light of the latest covenant expansion—the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:8–16—and David's genuine repentance in 12:13, these verses indicate that God will use repentant kings of Israel to fulfill the Davidic Covenant.	
12:26–31	(F) In light of the retribution principle, these verses function to reinforce the idea that God will use repentant kings of Israel.	

WRITE THE ORIGINAL-THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE

qualifying the statement, it cannot be said that “God redeems the king’s mistakes.”

Crafting an OT narrative’s OTM is tricky, because we are condensing the primary message of a dynamic narrative into a static theological principle. No single sentence can perfectly capture every nuance of a narrative’s OTM, but we can—and should—come very close. Expect to write many drafts before forming one that is accurate, precise, and clear. Below are five guidelines.

Guideline One: Accuracy

First, OTMs need to be accurate. While there are multiple ways to express the same OTM, we need to keep error from seeping in. Error seeps in when concepts that are not taught in the narrative are added to the OTM. In the OTMs below, I’ve crossed out the inaccuracies:

Inaccuracies in OTMs for 2 Samuel 11–12	
(1)	God longs to use individuals in Israel who are devoted to him and he will discipline those who ignore his will .
(2)	In spite of the king’s sin and its consequences, God is faithful to his everlast and gracious to his people.
(3)	No matter how far deep the kings of Israel dig a hole for themselves through sin, God will forgive them and be there for them if they trust him.
(4)	God redeems the king’s mistakes.

There are a few problems with (1) above. First, there is nothing in 2 Samuel 11–12 that indicates that God “longs” for anything. Second, its message pertains not to “individuals in Israel,” but to kings of Israel. Third, its message does not address those who are “devoted to him,” or who “ignore his will” but those [i.e., kings] who repent. In terms of (2), 2 Samuel 11–12 doesn’t teach that “God is faithful to his covenant”—though other narratives do. In terms of (3), the text doesn’t teach the idea of God being “there for” kings. That’s more of a contemporary idea. While I didn’t cross it out, I am also uncomfortable with the “no matter how far deep” aspect of the OTM. Regarding (4), without

Guideline Two: Precision
 Second, OTMs need to be precise. They should encapsulate the essence of a text’s primary theological principle—not just part of it. They should capture the central and specific message that a narrative was designed to communicate. Accurate but imprecise OTMs *do* carry the weight of biblical authority, but they miss the precise message that God designed their texts to communicate. Here are some imprecise OTMs for 2 Samuel 11–12.

Imprecise OTMs for 2 Samuel 11–12	
(A)	God is holy, righteous, and good and will discipline repentant kings of Israel for their sin.
(B)	God hates sin and cannot ignore it, but by repentance, the king’s restoration is assured through God’s love and grace.

While (A) and (B) are accurate—and thus they carry the weight of biblical authority—they are imprecise, because they fail to mention a crucial part of 2 Samuel 11–12’s message: that God will use repentant kings of Israel to fulfill the Davidic Covenant.

Guideline Three: One Complete, Crisp, and Immediately Understandable Sentence
 Third, OTMs need to be one complete, crisp, and immediately understandable sentence. They need to be one sentence, because OT narratives communicate only one *primary* theological principle. They need to be crisp and immediately understandable so that an OTM can be successfully communicated once it’s been converted into a THI. Crisp OTMs avoid wordiness. They contain no unnecessary words and rarely exceed 20 words. There is an easy way to know if an OTM is immediately understandable: Share it with someone else and ask them to tell you what it means. If they immediately comprehend it, chances are you’ve satisfied this guideline.

Guideline Four: Avoid “and”

Fourth, avoid the word “and.” Since an OTM from an OT narrative communicates a single idea, we should avoid “and,” because it indicates the presence of more than one idea. Loosely adapting Occam’s Razor to the creation of OTMs, if one idea explains other ideas, then stick with the one idea.

In order to avoid “and” in the OTM, you’ll often need to subsume certain ideas under other ideas. There are two times when it is a good idea to do this. First, an idea may be an implication of a central idea that should show up in the OTM. Take (A) from the “Imprecise OTMs” table. While 2 Samuel 11–12 teaches that “God is holy, righteous, and good,” these are implications of the central idea that “the Lord will use repentant kings of Israel to fulfill the Davidic Covenant, but despising the LORD’s word brings discipline.” That said, there may be a good place in the sermon to make such a statement. That good place, however, is not in the OTM or THT.

The second time is when an essential idea that a passage teaches may be subsumed under another essential concept. I recognize, for example, that an essential component of 2 Samuel 11–12’s message is that God will forgive repentant kings of Israel. The word “forgive,” however, does not appear in the OTM, because it falls under another essential concept, *viz.*, that God will use repentant kings of Israel.

OTM—you should also have the question it answers. It’s best, however, to determine the question that an OT narrative CUT answers at the same time as you determine the OTM, not after. Therefore, throughout sermon preparation, revising your OTM and the question it answers should be done together.

There are three benefits to determining the question an OTM answers. The first is that it helps us formulate accurate and precise OTMs. Many times, when I am struggling to nail an OTM, I hit the nail right on the head when I figure out the precise question the text is designed to communicate.

The second benefit is that it helps us formulate clear OTMs. Once again, there have been many times when I have crafted seemingly excellent OTMs, only to discover that they answer questions that are difficult to understand. This matters because a key way to get listeners to comprehend and remember a THT—the OTM’s sermonic equivalent—is to raise the question it answers. If the question it answers is worded in a convoluted or complex way, comprehension and memorability are decreased.

The third benefit is that it increases the sermon’s coherence and relevance, because it serves as the sermon’s focus question. Like the transition from the OTM to THT, the question that an OTM answers should become the focus question that the THT answers. This question increases the sermon’s coherence, because it serves as the sermon’s focus question. It increases the sermon’s relevance, because through it listeners become aware that the sermon will relate to their lives. The sermon focus is the second part of the sermon introduction. After engaging listeners in the sermon opening, we will focus the sermon, usually with a question that makes it crystal clear what the sermon is about and how it relates to real life.

Guideline Five: Simultaneously Determine the Question the OTM Answers
Multiple times throughout this step I have mentioned that we need to ask and answer the following question:

What question is this CUT designed to answer about God—his nature or covenant-keeping—to ancient Israel?

While I’ve discussed how to arrive at the OTM which is the answer to the question, I’ve haven’t spent any time on the question that a CUT is designed to answer. Of course, once you have the answer—i.e., the

I once opened a sermon on 2 Samuel 11–12 in John Ortberg-like fashion. I asked the congregation to turn to the person next to them and guess how many ambassadors the United States has to other nations and organizations. While opening a sermon with a question is generally ineffective and potentially counterproductive, this was a fun, open-ended, and safe question that proved to be effective.

As effective as the opening was, for the sermon to maintain its effectiveness, I needed to follow it with the sermon’s focus question in order to meet the congregation’s deep (but generally unconscious) need to know, “Where are you going with this message? What’s it about? What am I supposed to get from it?”²⁷ After drawing a few brief connections between government ambassadors and ambassadors for Christ, I raised and restated my focus question, “What kind of ambassador does God use to fulfill his plan of salvation?” I then said, “This morning, we are going to look at a story that answers that question.”

OTM: The LORD will use repentant kings of Israel to fulfill the Davidic Covenant, but despising the LORD’s word brings discipline.²⁹

THI: God uses us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.²⁹

All moves from the OTM to the THI must be hermeneutically sound. To preach with biblical authority, the words of our THI must be a genuine expression of their time-specific counterparts. Preaching with biblical authority requires our hermeneutical bridges from the “there and then” of the OTM to the “here and now” of the THI to be structurally sound.

Some hermeneutical bridges are easier to build than others. The move from “the LORD” to “God” is an easy one. “The Davidic Covenant” is one stage in God’s plan of salvation, so that one’s easy as well. “Despising the LORD’s word,” however, is more difficult. Does it represent sin in general, heinous sins, or those committed against other people? After consulting multiple commentaries, it became clear that it represents sin in general.

The most difficult bridge to build was with “repentant kings of Israel.” Who are their contemporary equivalents? Christ? Believers today? No one? Christ is definitely *the* king. And, the passage points to the need for Christ, because it’s only through his atoning sacrifice that God could use sinful kings or anyone else to fulfill his plan of salvation. Christ isn’t a genuine equivalent, however, because he isn’t sinful and, therefore, has no need to repent.

Step 5 Craft the Take-Home Truth

We now turn to the skills for determining the *wording* of the THI. The THI is the message of the sermon. It is a timeless or contemporary expression of the OTM. It takes the time-specific language of the OTM and replaces it with timeless or contemporary equivalents.²⁸ For OT narratives, it will generally serve as the only principle that we spend time applying. Notice below that the OTM’s time-specific concepts, which are underlined, are replaced with timeless or contemporary equivalents in the THI.

²⁷ Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 199.

²⁸ Some modifications to this method would be necessary when preaching the OT law, but that’s a discussion for another reference tool!

²⁹ See the final page of the reference tool for the hermeneutical justification for moving from the *wording* of the OTM to the *wording* of the THI.

I concluded that “believers today” was the legitimate equivalent. While the job description of a king of Israel—like that of an OT priest—was different, the essential characteristics of a king of Israel—like that of an OT priest—are the essential characteristics of a believer today.³⁰ This can be seen in 2 Samuel 11–12, where in 12:7 God refers to King David as an “anointed” king. Going to 1 Samuel 16:13 clarifies that this anointing was an anointing of the Spirit. Furthermore, in 2 Samuel 12:7–14, all of the other essential characteristics of King David match the essential characteristics of believers today. Like King David, believers today are specially blessed by God, sinful, but contrite, and subject to discipline (2 Corinthians 1:21–22; Ephesians 1:3; 1 John 1:5–10; Hebrews 12:5–6). All of this is ample justification for equating “repentant kings of Israel” with “us”—i.e., “believers today.”

³⁰ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 349.

Step 1: Select a Complete Unit of Thought (CUT)

What Verses Make the CUT?		Beginning Markers (vv.)		End Markers (vv.)	
Introduction		Clear	Less Clear	Clear	Less Clear
Problem		Clear	Less Clear	Clear	Less Clear
Solution		Clear	Less Clear	Clear	Less Clear
Conclusion		Clear	Less Clear	Clear	Less Clear

Step 2: Identify the Theological and Historical Contexts

Theological Subject:	The LORD or God		Keep Asking:	What question is this CUT designed to answer about God's nature or God's covenant-keeping to ancient Israel?		
Original Audience:	Israel Preparing to Enter the Promised Land		Israel in the Promised Land		Israel Under Foreign Oppression	
Latest Old Covenant Expansion	Eden Gen 3:15	Noah Gen 9:8-17	Abraham Gen 12:1-3; Gen 15; Gen 17	Sinai (Law) Exod 19:5-6; Exod 20-23 All of Deut, esp. Deut 1:7-8; 7:7-10; 9:4-6; 28	David 2 Sam 7:8-16; cf. 23:5 1 Kings 2:1-4; 1 Kings 6:12-13; 1 Kings 9:4-9; 1 Kings 11:11-13, 32-39 2 Chron 21:7	

Steps 3 – 5: Study the Plot and Determine the OTM and THT

Most Common Characters' Names	Proper Name Count	Theologically Representative? If so, of what?	Structural Commentary	Theological or Functional Purpose
1.			Previous CUTs?	
2.			Narrator Comments	
3.			Repeated Words/ Phrases	
4.				
5.				
6.				

Scene (vv.)	# of Verses	Real Time (est.)	% Dialogue (est.)	Notes on Theological or Functional Purpose

Question the OTM Answers:	
Original-Theological Message:	The LORD/God

Sermon Focus Question:	
Take-Home Truth:	God

Chapter 3

A Succinct Commentary on 2 Samuel 11–12

Whenever we enhance our skills, few things are more helpful than instant feedback. Good habits take time to develop, and bad ones take time to work themselves out of our system. This chapter contains a succinct commentary on 2 Samuel 11–12, so that you can see how the theory of Chapter 1 and the skills of Chapter 2 come together in sermon preparation.

INTRODUCTION TO 2 SAMUEL 10–20

The original audience of 2 Samuel was Israel in the Promised Land, possibly during the reign of Solomon or shortly thereafter. Their primary concern was a secure existence in the Promised Land, especially as outlined in the Davidic Covenant.

1–2 Samuel addresses these concerns. It shows how the original audience's historical situation is a continuation of what God has been doing through Israel since the days of Genesis. 1–2 Samuel narrates how Israel not only wanted a king, it wanted one like the other nations: one who "will judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Samuel 8:20). Samuel warns them that a king would rule them as he pleased. He'd tax them, draft them, and use their resources for personal gain (1 Samuel 8:10–18; cf. 2 Samuel 5:13). He warns that their dependence upon a worldly king would result in their loss. "And in that day, you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you on that day" (1 Samuel 8:18). God responds by selecting and anointing Saul, a king according to the people's standards (9:1–2). The results are disastrous.

In his grace, God selects and anoints David, a man after his own heart, to succeed Saul (1 Samuel 16:6–7; 11–14). Eventually he's crowned king

of Judah (2 Samuel 2:1–7) and Israel (5:1–16). God establishes a covenant with David, saying that he will secure a peaceful existence for Israel through the seed of David, who is not yet born. In this way, David's throne will be established forever (7:8–16).

Latest Covenant Expansion

The latest covenant expansion is the Davidic Covenant found in 2 Samuel 7:8–16. While it demonstrates its ties to earlier covenant promises in Genesis 12 and 15, the Davidic Covenant contains new promises pertaining to the line of David. Here is an outline of the Davidic Covenant from 2 Samuel 7:8–16:

1. God chose David, born in humble conditions, to be king over Israel (7:8).
2. God has given David success thus far (7:9).
3. God will make David's name great (7:9; cf. Genesis 12:2).
4. God will appoint a place and plant Israel there.
 - This will be Israel's own place (cf. Genesis 15:7).
 - Israel will not be disturbed/afflicted by enemies (7:10; cf. Gen 12:3).
 - 5. God will give David rest from all of his enemies (7:11).
 - 6. God will make David a house (7:11).
 - 7. God will raise a seed/child not yet born to David (7:12).
 - God will establish the child's kingdom (7:12).
 - He shall build a temple (7:13a).
 - God will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (7:13).
 - 8. God will be the child's father, and he will be God's son (7:14).
 - When he sins, God will discipline him (7:14).
 - But God's covenantal love won't depart from him as with Saul (7:15).
 - 9. In this way, God will establish David's house, kingdom, and throne forever (7:16).

Step 1: Select a Complete Unit of Thought (CUT)

These chapters form an indivisible CUT. There are clear beginning markers at 11:1 and 13:1, but not at 12:1 and 12:15b, where the phrase “And the LORD” suggests the end of a scene. A clear end marker is found at 12:31, but not at 11:27b. That the story’s problem, David’s sin, isn’t resolved until 12:23 indicates that these chapters form a CUT.

Step 2: Identify the Theological and Historical Contexts

Since this CUT is an OT narrative, we can know that it is designed to answer a question about God—his nature or covenant-keeping to ancient Israel. Thus, “the LORD” or “God” will be the grammatical subject of the OTM.

The original audience of 1–2 Samuel knows that its fate is intertwined with the actions of its king. The problem, as it knows firsthand, is that kings are often disobedient to God, the ultimate source of their security. If a king’s perfect obedience is a prerequisite for security in the Promised Land, then Israel’s fate is all but certain.

In 1–2 Samuel, the lives of Saul and David are intentionally contrasted. Both are sinful, but for some reason David is the kind of king God uses to fulfill his plans. Saul is not. This story brings this issue into focus. It answers the question, “What kind of sinful king will God use to fulfill the Davidic Covenant?”

Step 3: Study the Plot

While at first glance the plot seems to revolve around David, Bathsheba, and their adultery, a closer look reveals otherwise. David is named forty-one times, Uriah twenty-three, the LORD fourteen, and Bathsheba only twice. The one-month process of Uriah’s murder is covered in twenty verses, God’s one-hour rebuke of David via Nathan

in fourteen verses, and the one- to two-month adultery-pregnancy ordeal in two verses. The narrative’s most important scene is God’s rebuke of David via Nathan which has the largest concentration of dialogue at 90 percent. The second most important scene is Uriah’s murder in 11:6–25. It is 50 percent dialogue, is narrated in 20 verses, and serves to exemplify God’s charges against David in 12:7–14. Interestingly, David and Bathsheba’s adultery-pregnancy ordeal is only 7 percent dialogue.

Step 4: Determine the Wording of the Original-Theological Message

God via Nathan delivers the bulk of the narrative’s OTM in 12:7–14 via a stream of dialogue in the narrative’s most important scene. In it, he encapsulates the message of 11:1–27 as “despising” him and his word. In 12:13, David responds with repentance, in contrast to Saul. God preserves his life and forgives him, but discipline will still ensue. That God will use repentant kings of Israel to fulfill the Davidic Covenant is seen in 12:24–25, which fulfills the promise in 2 Samuel 7:12 that a seed of David’s “shall come”—future tense—to rule the throne. This is fascinating because David already had six sons before the promise was made (2 Samuel 3:1–5). This turn of events probably surprised the original audience as Solomon, Israel’s king, is born.

OTM: The LORD will use repentant kings of Israel to fulfill the Davidic Covenant, but despising the LORD’s word brings discipline.

THT: God uses us to fulfill his plan of salvation, but sin brings discipline.

Step 5: Craft the Take-Home Truth

The move from “the LORD” to “God” is an easy one. “The Davidic Covenant” is one stage in God’s plan of salvation, so that one’s easy as well. A careful look at “despising the LORD’s word” indicates that this is a reference to sin in general, not just heinous sins or those committed against another person.

The move from “repentant kings of Israel” to “us”—i.e., believers today—is legitimate. While the job description of a king of Israel—like that of an OT priest—was different, the essential characteristics of a king of Israel—like that of an OT priest—are the essential characteristics of a believer today.¹ This can be seen in 2 Samuel 11–12, where in 12:7 God refers to King David as an “anointed” king. Going to 1 Samuel 16:13 clarifies that this anointing was an anointing of the Spirit. Furthermore, in 2 Samuel 12:7–14, all of the other essential characteristics of King David match the essential characteristics of believers today. Like King David, believers today are specially blessed by God, sinful, but contrite, and subject to discipline (2 Corinthians 12:1–22; Ephesians 1:3; 1 John 1:5–10; Hebrews 12:5–6). All of this is ample justification for equating “repentant kings of Israel” with “us”—i.e., “believers today.”

¹ William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 2004), 349.

APPENDIX D

PICTURE-PAINTING APPLICATIONS

Preaching is about life change. Using the Bible and a few illustrations—stories, props, humor, metaphors, etc.—we can convince and inspire listeners to follow biblical principles, but that doesn’t mean they know what it looks like to live them out in everyday life. This article shows you how to increase your effectiveness with Picture-Painting Applications (PPA)—compelling “how-to” applications that show listeners what it looks like to put biblical principles into practice.

Keys to Effectiveness

Relax. Perfectionism kills creativity. Don’t try to create the most engaging, relevant applications possible. “Okay” PPAs are effective.

Determine the Biblical Concept. Be clear about the specific biblical principle you are applying. Write it down. Revise it. It needs to derive from the theological message of the biblical text(s) on which it’s based. Without sacrificing accuracy, craft it into a sentence that someone unfamiliar with your sermon would understand immediately. Typically, this sentence will be a main point.

Identify Applicable Situations. To come up with applicable situations, create a Life Situation Grid such as the one that follows, select the characteristics of the target person, and ask, “For someone in this situation, when would this biblical concept be applicable?”

Don’t worry about a PPA missing someone. Listeners adjust what they hear to fit their lives. If you can’t come up with anything, ask a friend. You could also create a “sermon application team,” a group of people who you can call to help you figure out what it looks like to live out a biblical principle.

Age Range	Gender (M/F)	Employment Status	Job Level	Income Level	Marital Status	Kids' Ages	Regular Activities
15–18	M	Homemaker	Entry Level	\$0–25K	Single	Under 2	Ministry
18–25	F	Unemployed	Skilled	\$25–50K	Dating	2–4	Ministry Leader
25–35		Laid Off	Trade	\$50–75K	Engaged	4–6	Driving
35–50		Fired	Sales	\$75–100K	Newlywed	7–10	House Work
50–65		Employed	Manager	\$100–150K	Married	10–11	Paying Bills
65+		Retired	Executive	\$150–300K	Remarried	Jr High	Paying Taxes
			Owner	\$300K+	Divorced	High School	Hobbies
					Widowed	College	Kids' Activities
						Grown	Kids' Sports

Be Realistic. When we show how the Bible applies to specific situations, listeners run what we say through a reality filter. The more realistic the application, the more effective it is. Use words and thought patterns that are understandable to everyone. Work plausibly from problem to solution. Make the possible outcome and long-term benefit believable.

Show More Than Tell. Showing engages listeners more than telling. We “tell” when we narrate with description (“You walk toward your room.”). Showing stimulates listeners’ imagination through the use of action. It involves them in the application (“Your eyes widen, your heart races. You take a step, then another, and another.”). Telling is helpful, however, when we want to move quickly to a more crucial point in the application.

Use Self-Talk and Dialogue. Like action, self-talk and dialogue grab listeners’ attention more than description. Say, “I’m gonna set her straight,” not “You decide to set her straight.” It’s more animated. It’s more engaging. It reaches the heart quicker.

Template

Transition. Transition to the PPA with a clear question that includes the biblical concept you will apply. Consider introducing it with a general description of the person it’s tailored to.

What does it look like “to love our spouse even when we don’t want to?” Maybe you’re the dad of a Little Leaguer. Imagine:

Setting. Begin with a peaceful introduction. Its purpose is to activate listeners’ imagination and orient them to the application’s time and location. Involve the five senses. What do they see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. How do they feel? Minimize description. Use action, thoughts, and dialogue.

Your eyes open on a Saturday morning. [squinting] “7am?!” [vocalize grogginess]. [with an optimistic, groggy, smile] Nothing coffee can’t fix. You head to the kitchen. You make yourself a cup of delicious [chuckling] Folgers Crystals. [motion of drinking coffee] “It’s Little League time again. [pause to take sip] I wonder how my little slugger’s doing.” [pause to take a sip] You walk over to your son’s room, [left hand grabs door, peak in, sip coffee]. “[doting whisper] He’s sound asleep [pause]. [head jerks back slightly, eyes widen, coffee cup still in hand] but look at the clothes and toys everywhere. No big deal. [sip coffee] He knows he’ll have to pick this all up before he goes out with his friends.”

A few hours later, everyone heads to the park. As soon as the game’s over you get your son a post-game burger and head to his team’s dugout. “Oh look! There’re Greg’s parents, Bill and Suzanne talking to the wife.” You join the conversation.

Problem. We need to introduce a trial, test, opportunity, or temptation early on to establish relevance and hold interest. It should be a problem that people actually face, one that your biblical concept applies to, and one in which the normal response is the wrong one. It should leave them feeling, “Ooh, that’s a tough one” or “I know that one.”

A few minutes later, “Bye, Dad” [head turns down and slightly right, bend down to hug son]. [with a nice, but puzzled expression] “Where are you going?” “Dear, I told him he could go over to Greg’s house. He can pick up his room tomorrow.”

Rationalization. Next, we want to construct a worldly, but reasonable response. Build a quality case for the worldly response. Quality rationalizations increase an application’s effectiveness in three ways. First, they add to our credibility, because they show that we understand the challenges of real life. Second, they increase listeners’ interest. Third, they make the biblical response more compelling, because it is proves to be more satisfying than its worldly alternative.

Completely silent, [head turned down-right, smiling] you think, “What? I am so sick and tired of this. I’m not going to sit here and let her turn my kid into an irresponsible adult.”

You both say goodbye to Bill and Suzanne, Greg’s parents.

As you walk to the car, you prepare to unleash your argument. “Honey, it’s not about the room. It’s about raising a responsible adult. He’s twelve years old. You’ve gotta stick to the rules! You want to be nice to him? You want to love him? Try being consistent!”

Plot Twist. Right when it seems the rationalization will win the day, listeners are reminded of your biblical concept or its passage(s). Be sure to quote your biblical concept or words from its text(s).

[hand turning, make a sound like that of a car starting] Ready to make your case, a thought arises: “God calls me to love my wife, even when I don’t want to.”

Biblical Response. It's now time to resolve the rationalization—not the problem. The biblical response narrates steps that can be taken to put the biblical concept into practice. Avoid solving the problem, arguing against the rationalization, or making the situation look like one big misunderstanding.

[looking up] “God, it’s hard. All I want to do is raise a good kid in a tough world. A kid who loves you. But, you’re right. It’s best to love her even now.”

[Take breath, smile. Turning to the right, quick kiss on the side of forehead] You begin to talk about the game. That Thursday, you take your wife out to dinner. On the way home you stop at Coldstone for ice cream. “Honey, can you help me with something?” “Sure.” You share your struggle and concern.

Possible Outcome and Benefit. Bring your PPAs to a soul-satisfying end by providing an immediate outcome and long-term benefit. Briefly, provide one or two outcomes which you qualify with “possible” language. You can also admit you don’t know how things will turn out. Then, share something *certain* about the nature of the biblical response or God’s reaction to it.

End the application with a *possible* long-term benefit. Try to make it an earthly benefit, some two to twenty years out. Make it relational. Show how your biblical response positively affected another person. Oftentimes, it’ll be someone who was not in the application up until that point, but who was positively affected by the courageous act of faithfulness. You could also opt for a possible conversation in heaven or speak of looking forward to increased eternal reward.

I’m not going to suggest the problem’ll be solved right then. What I can tell you is that you brought honor and glory to God. And who knows, you may find it marked the beginning of a deeper, richer relationship between you.

Variations

Half & Half. This variation involves giving the setting, problem, and rationalization at one point in the sermon and the rest of the PPA at a later point. This can be helpful for biblical passages or topical messages that unfold in a problem-solution sequence.

Compact. Full PPAs take time, anywhere from two to four minutes. They are worth every minute. I recommend at least one per sermon. Shorter PPAs are an excellent way to increase your sermon’s relevance. In one to three sentences each: (1) combine the setting and problem, (2) move to your rationalization, then (3) combine the plot twist and biblical response. The possible outcome and long-term benefit are optional.

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